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THE
HISTORY
OF THE
CHURCH OF CHRIST.

VOLUME THE FIRST.

CONTAINING
THE THREE FIRST CENTURIES.



BY JOSEPH MILNER, M. A.
Late Master of the Grammar School in Kingston upon Hull.



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HISTORY

OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

IN THE UNITED STATES

BY

JOSEPH W. FLETCHER

THE FIRST VOLUME

BY JOSEPH W. FLETCHER, M.A.

Author of "The Church in the United States," &c.

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INTRODUCTION.

IN my proposals for printing this "History of the Church of Christ" I promised "An Ecclesiastical History on a new Plan." The reader therefore will naturally expect some distinct account of a plan, which, in a subject so generally known, lays claim to novelty, in order that he may judge for himself, whether it appears sufficiently interesting to engage his perusal of the work itself.

It is certain, that from our Saviour's time to the present, there have ever been persons whose dispositions and lives have been formed by the rules of the New Testament; men who have been *real*, not merely *nominal* christians, who believed the doctrines of the gospel, loved them because of their divine excellency, and suffered gladly the *loss of all things, that they might win Christ, and be found in him.** It is the history of these men which I propose to write. It is of no consequence with respect to my plan, nor of much importance I believe in its own nature, to what *external* church they belonged. I intend not to enter with any nicety into an account

* Philip. iii. 8, 9

of their rites and ceremonies, or forms of church-government, much less into their secular history. Even religious controversies shall be omitted, except those which seem to bear a relation to the essence of Christ's religion, and of which the history of his real church seems to require some account. Let not the reader expect, that the actions of great men (great in a secular view I mean) will be exhibited to his notice. Nothing but what belongs to Christ's kingdom shall be admitted, and genuine piety is that alone which I intend to celebrate.

It must have struck a careful observer, that such a history is as yet a great *desideratum*. Malice has been fed even to satiety, by the large displays of *ecclesiastical wickedness*. The wildest and the most visionary heretics have filled the historic page, and their follies, both in principle and practice, have been deemed worthy of a particular enumeration. The internal dissensions of churches have been minutely described. The intricacies and intrigues of popery, and indeed of every other secular system, which pretends to wear a religious garb, have been developed with a studious particularity; the connexion between the church and the state has afforded very ample materials of what is commonly called church history; and learning and philosophy have been much more respected than godliness and virtue.

No doubt some more ancient voluminous church historians, as well as Mosheim in his Compendium, have given us much useful information, and if one can look on them as *civil* historians altogether, they are not to be blamed. Had they incorporated into their secular narratives an account of the progress of godliness itself, I should not have dared to reprehend them as ecclesiastical historians. But they evidently give a much larger proportion to the history of wickedness, than to that of piety in general. Hence the evils which have been practised in christian countries seem even greater than they really were; and the disagreeable effect which the reading of Mosheim had on my own mind is probably no singular case, that real religion seems scarce to have had any existence. Infidel malice has triumphed, though very unreasonably, on account of these things; the vices of christians, so called, have certainly been exaggerated on the whole; and deists and skeptics have taken advantage, partly from hence, and partly from the poverty of our information concerning Mahometans and Pagans, to represent them as more virtuous than christians.

What account can be given of this unhappily partial view of church history? Genuine godliness is fond of secrecy; humility is of its essence. She seeks not the praise of men, but the praise of God, and hides even the good she does from

the world more studiously than wickedness conceals its evils; her sincerest votaries have likewise been chiefly private persons, such as have seldom moved in the public and noisy scenes of life. The most celebrated historians, who hitherto have appeared, seem not to have had so much relish for godliness, as to be induced to take any pains to draw her out of her modest obscurity.* The prevalence of wickedness in all ages has heightened the difficulty.† From these causes the scarcity of materials for what properly deserves

* Fox's Book of Martyrs is however one striking exception to this remark. The Magdeburgensian Centuriators, whom I did not meet with, till I had finished this volume, are likewise in part exempted from the charge of writing ecclesiastical history in the secular manner which I have reprehended. Yet while they omit, or very lamely recount some most important christian facts, they relate with tedious exactness many uninteresting particulars. They seem however to have been men of real piety, industry, and learning, and may be of real use to me in subsequent parts of the history, should I continue it.

The volume of Mr. Newton is well known, and its merit has been acknowledged by men of piety and judgment. I once thought of beginning only where he ended. But as there is an unity of manner and style which belongs to every author who plans and executes for himself, and as in some points I really found myself to differ in sentiment from this very respectable writer, I altered my opinion, contented in this place to acknowledge, that so far as I can recollect, the perusal of his instructive volume of ecclesiastical history first suggested to me the idea of this work.

† An history of the perversions and abuses of religion is not properly an history of the church; as absurd were it to suppose an history of the highwaymen that have infested this country to be an history of England.

the name of church history is much greater than any person, who has not examined the subject, can even conceive. I have all along however, to the best of my ability and opportunity, consulted original records, and have never contented myself with copying the sentiments of modern historians.

I hope I shall be allowed to call the plan, I propose, a proper one. Certainly the terms "church and christian" do in their most *natural* and *primary sense* respect only *good* men. The Divine Founder of our religion has promised, *that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. Such a succession of pious men in all ages must therefore have existed; and it will be no contemptible use of such an history as this, if it prove, that, in every age, there have been *real* followers of Christ. Other uses cannot fail to offer themselves. To see and trace the goodness of God by his providence and grace, in every age, taking care of his church, will be, to the devout mind, a refreshment of the most grateful nature. The honour of christianity will be supported, the value of its essential doctrines ascertained, and we shall have frequent occasion to state what the gospel is, and what it is not. Hence the triumphs of the skeptic will appear to be unfounded in truth, when it shall be evident on the whole, that Christ's religion has ever existed and brought forth its proper fruits, to which no other system can make any

just pretension; finally, that the evils of which christians, so called, have been guilty, arose not from the gospel itself, but from the hypocrisy of those who assumed that worthy name, to which neither their faith nor their practice gave them any right.

These, and other obvious advantages of such an history, have determined me to attempt it. I feel oppressed with the greatness of the subject. Nevertheless, with God's help, I must proceed. *In magnis voluisse sat est.*

I have two things further to premise, 1st, to assure the reader that I shall think it my indispensable duty to give him real facts; and if I be rather more copious in reflections than the severe laws of history allow, he will do well to observe, that the fashionable misrepresentations of ancient story require some attention.

And, 2dly, I fairly warn the reader not to expect from me any indulgence in the modern taste of skepticism. I shall not affect to doubt the credibility of ancient respectable historians. And as it is hardly possible to avoid altogether the infection of the age in which one lives, I seem to myself sufficiently secured, by the torrent of prevailing opinions, from the other extreme of superstitious belief. Both ought to be avoided; but that which supports itself by the appearance

of solid sense, by the authority of great names, and by the love of applause, must of course be the more ensnaring. The present age in matters of religion may justly be called the age of self-sufficiency; we condemn the ancients by wholesale; we suspect their historical accounts without judgment; malevolence and profaneness are both supported by these things; we seem to imagine, that we are without any parallels in understanding; we are amazed, that our ancestors should so long be deluded by absurdities, little suspecting how much some future age will pity or blame us for follies of which we imagine ourselves perfectly clear.

J. M.



CENTURY I.

CHAP. I.

A SUMMARY VIEW OF THE CHURCH, SO FAR AS IT
MAY BE COLLECTED FROM THE SCRIPTURE.

SECTION I.

Jerusalem.

THAT “repentance and remission of sins should
“be preached in the name of Jesus Christ, beginning
“at Jerusalem,” * is a text which at once points out
what the christian religion is, and where we are to
look for its beginning. We are to describe the rise
of a dispensation the most glorious to God, and the
most beneficent to man. Christianity found man-
kind in an universal state of sin and misery. In Ju-
dea alone something of the worship of the true God
existed. The forms of the Mosaic economy sub-
sisted, but greatly obscured and corrupted with
Pharisaic traditions, and Sadducean profaneness.
The ancient people of God had defiled themselves
with heathen profligacy; and though there wanted
not a multitude of teachers among them, yet, when
He, who knew what was in man, saw the spiritual
condition of this people, “he was moved with com-
“passion toward them, because they fainted, and
“were as sheep without a shepherd.” Certainly
they were not destitute of a degree at least of moral
instruction, though that was extremely defective, and,
in many points of view, fundamentally erroneous.
But of that instruction, which consists in repentance

* Luke xxiv. 47.

and remission of sins, they were totally destitute. Notwithstanding the light of the Old Testament, the provision of sacrifices, the declaration of so many prophecies concerning the Messiah, and the examples of so many holy men, who, in that dark and preparatory dispensation, had learned to fear God, and to believe in his promises of grace, it does not appear, that the body of the Jewish nation were, in their religious state, materially better than the rest of the world. That men needed such a change of disposition as in scripture is expressed by the term *μετανοια*, to be made new creatures, and to receive the forgiveness of sins by faith in the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, were ideas unknown in Judea; if indeed we except the dim light which visited the souls of Zacharias, of Simeon, of Anna, and a few other devout persons, who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

Such was the dismal night, in which the Sun of Righteousness made his appearance in the world. Scarce in any age had ignorance and wickedness a more general prevalence. The history of Josephus evinces this; he dwells chiefly indeed on public and political affairs, but yet throws a sufficient light on the manners of the times, and shews, that the extreme impiety and profligacy of the Herodian princes were but too faithfully transcribed into the lives of their subjects. There had been periods of Jewish story more favourable to godliness; the age of Joshua for instance, of David, of Ezra, and Nehemiah: for some there ever were who, at least, implicitly rested on the God of Israel, and trusted in the Redeemer that was to come. But the darkest season was chosen, for the exhibition of the Light of Life by Him, "who hath put the times and seasons in his own power."

To know our own depravity and helplessness, and by faith in Christ to know "experimentally" the true cure, is doubtless the genuine secret of true piety. But wherever wickedness and profaneness have spread very generally, the Knowledge of these doctrines is usually lost; amidst a thousand disputes even on

religious subjects, these are erased out of men's creed which alone can be the means of freeing them from vice and folly. It was their ignorance of these things which moved the Son of God to lament the uninformed condition of the Jews in his day. To dwell on the history of Christ himself is foreign to my design. Indeed a few souls were converted during his abode on earth: But the five hundred brethren, who saw him all at one time after his resurrection, seem to have made the sum total of his disciples. But all these, and the eleven sincere apostles themselves, were possessed with notions of a temporal kingdom, the rock on which their countrymen fatally split in their expositions of the scriptures relating to the expected Messiah, and had not yet learned, with any clearness and steadiness of apprehension, to set their affections on things above.

And now was the critical moment, when it pleased God to erect the first christian church at Jerusalem. This was the first of those "out-pourings" of the Spirit of God, which from age to age have visited the earth, since the coming of Christ, and prevented it from being quite over-run with ignorance and sin. It is an unspeakable advantage, that we have the sacred narrative to unfold this to us; the want of such an advantage will appear too fully in our history of the succeeding out-pourings* of the Divine Spirit. Our duty however is not to complain, but to be thankful. If we carefully attend to this first instance, it will serve as a specimen, by which to try other religious phenomena, and whether they lead to genuine piety or not, may generally be judged from their agreement or disagreement with this.

Let us then observe the circumstances in which this out-pouring of the Holy Spirit was vouchsafed.

Note. The word "out-pouring" I have taken from the prophetic language of scripture, as expressive of a more remarkable display of divine grace at some particular season. Modern politeness, I confess, knows no such term, nor does it own the idea affixed to it.

* I include not in the idea of this unfashionable, but significant term, the miraculous or extraordinary operations of the Spirit of God I mean only such as he vouchsafes in every age to his church. My plan has little connexion with the former.

As repentance and remission of sins were the leading doctrines of Christ's religion, the most ample room had been made for them by the completion of his redemption. He had offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of men, "was risen" from the dead "for our justification," and in the sight of his disciples was just ascended up to heaven. That the gospel, the good news of reconciliation with God for penitent sinners, should begin at Jerusalem, the scene of so much wickedness perpetrated, and of so much grace abused, was itself no mean argument of the riches of Divine Goodness, and was an illustrious exemplification of the grand purpose of the gospel, to justify the ungodly, and to quicken the dead. By the order of their Divine Master the apostles remained at Jerusalem, waiting for the promised Holy Spirit, "which they had heard of him,"* and abode in mutual charity, and in the fervent exercise of prayer and supplication. What the Holy Spirit was to do for them, they seemed little to understand; if one may guess from their last question to their Master, "Wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" It is natural to apprehend, that they were feasting their imaginations with the delightful prospect of a splendid kingdom, attended with all the circumstances of external pomp and grandeur. Principalities and lordships were in their fancy soon to be assumed in the room of fishermen's nets and boats, and they pleased themselves with the notion of their Master's external dominion in the world. Not that they were without a genuine taste for something infinitely better. At any rate, they afford us an useful lesson; "they continued in prayer and supplication." They, who do so in every age, shall doubtless understand, in God's due time, what the kingdom of heaven means, and find it by happy experience set up in their own souls, even "righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

During this interesting crisis, we do not find them employed in any other business than this of prayer,

* Acts i. 4.

except in filling up the apostolical college of twelve, by the substitution of Matthias in the room of the unhappy Judas, who, for the love of a little gain of this world, had unfitted himself for the riches of the next, and rendered himself unworthy to partake of the marvellous scene now about to be exhibited. Behold then the twelve apostles, Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simeon Zelotes, Judas the brother of James, and Matthias, expecting and longing for the unspeakable blessings of true christianity.

The Pentecost, one of the Jewish festivals, was the era of the Divine Visitation. The apostles were all in harmony assembled together; when lo! suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. Their Master had, in his conference with Nicodemus,* compared the operations of the Holy Spirit to the wind, and the sound from heaven on this occasion was a just emblem of the power of the Divine Influence now commencing. And there appeared "unto them cloven tongues like as of fire and "it sat upon each of them:"† Another emblem no less just, which the church of England uses in her hymn to the Holy Ghost in the ordination-office,

Thy blessed unction from above
Is comfort, life, and fire of love.

In truth they now found they were "baptized with "the Holy Spirit and with fire."‡ And the effects in purifying their hearts, in enlightening their understandings, and in furnishing them with gifts, and zeal, and boldness, hitherto unknown, were very soon exhibited. They were all filled with the "Holy Ghost, "and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit "gave them utterance." Of the many miraculous gifts now imparted, this of tongues, at once so useful for the propagation of the gospel, and so striking an attestation of its truth, first displayed itself to the

* John iii.

† Acts ii.

‡ Matt. iii. 11.

amazement of a number of Jews, out of every nation under heaven, who heard these Galileans speak each in his own language. There is reason to believe that, as many of them were devout men, they had been prepared by Divine Grace for the effectual reception of the gospel, and that a considerable part of the first converts were of their body.

While many were expressing their admiration at this strange event, others, whom we may suppose to have been chiefly the native Jews, who understood not these several languages, derided the apostles as intoxicated with wine; and now the zeal of Peter was stirred up to preach both to those who admired, and to those who scorned. He begged them to have so much candour, as not rashly to suppose them to be men overcome with liquor, which the very time of the day would forbid, the third hour of the day, answering to our nine in the morning, when it seems no Jew was ever known to be in that situation. And as his audience professed a regard for the sacred oracles, he pointed out to them a remarkable prophecy in the second chapter of Joel, then fulfilling, the promise of an "outpouring" of the Spirit upon all flesh, attended with dreadful punishments on those who should despise it; yet that whoever, in the deep sense of his sinfulness and misery, should call on the name of the Lord, should be saved. He then shews them at once how God had fulfilled his own purposes in the death of Jesus, while they had been executing the dictates of their own malice: he proceeds to testify also of his resurrection, according to the testimony of David, in *Psa. xvi.* and *cx.* in both which Psalms it was evident, that not David himself, but Christ was the subject of the prophecy. He openly declares, that he and his brethren were witnesses of the resurrection of their Master, that he was exalted to heaven, and had received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, which he had now shed forth on the apostles, and concerning which they now had the plain demonstration of their senses. The conclusion which he draws from

this chain of argument, supported by the mutual strength of facts and prophecies, was this, that the despised person, whom they had thought unworthy to live, and had exposed to the most painful and ignominious death, was owned by the God of their fathers to be the Lord and Messiah, who was the expectation of the Jews, and through whom alone salvation was exhibited to sinful men.

The design of the whole sermon was evidently to beget conviction of sin in the hearers; and it pleased God to crown it with success. Multitudes were pricked in their hearts; they found themselves guilty of murdering the Christ of God; and so powerfully were they struck with a sense of their extreme unworthiness, that they found themselves also destitute of all resources in themselves. "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" they cry to Peter and to the rest. This is indeed the beginning of all true repentance, when men find themselves really lost, helpless, and willing to be led in any way which God shall please, because they have no ability in themselves, and "there is no health in them."* Peter said unto them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

Thus the doctrine of repentance and remission of sins, in the name of Jesus, began at Jerusalem. Let them loath themselves for their past iniquities, and give themselves up to God for an entire renovation of soul; the grace of God in Christ was offered to every one of them. He exhorted them all to receive this grace, by believing on Jesus for the remission of sins, with a submission to his ordinance of baptism as an emblem of washing away their sins, and assured them, that God would receive them into his favour in this way; that however guilty they were, all their sins should be pardoned, as if they had never

* The Church of England Confession.

been committed, and the Holy Ghost should be poured on them also; for the promise of it was very general, to them, to their children, to the most distant lands, wherever God should call men to reconciliation by Jesus Christ. Thus did St. Peter convince his hearers of sin, and instruct them in the way of salvation.

They, whose hearts God had smitten with a sense of guilt, were consoled by the grace of forgiveness; and "with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word, were baptized; and the same day there were added to them about three thousand souls."

In this manner did the convictions and consolations of the Holy Ghost attend the first preaching of St. Peter. And this great multitude appear to have been fully converted to christianity: For they continued "stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

Here we see the regular appearance of the first christian church. They were not christians in name only; they understood and believed the apostolical doctrine concerning repentance and remission of sins in the name of Jesus Christ; they continued united to the pastors whom God had made instruments of their conversion; they received constantly the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, in which they enjoyed real communion with their Saviour, and prayer was their daily employment and delight. Their holy boldness towards God, and their joyful sensation of forgiveness, were tempered with a godly fear. Every soul was possessed with it. They had felt the pangs of guilt; they had seen what a price was paid for their redemption; they "rejoiced with trembling," as men just emerged from the pit of destruction; and the same spirit which cried Abba, Father,* in their hearts, taught them to reverence his justice and his holiness, to fear him, and to dread sin above all other evils.

* Galatians iv. 6.

And though it does not appear to have been any injunction of the apostles, that they should live together in a community of goods, and experience soon taught the first christians, that the general establishment and continuance of it was impracticable, yet was it doubtless a rare instance of their mutual charity, and proved how soon the operations of Divine Grace had loosened their minds from the love of this world, that they practised this for the present and “sold their goods and possessions, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.” In this happy frame they spent much of their time in the temple, and in the mutual offices of social kindness; even their bodily food was received with a gladness before unknown. The Grace of God gave a pleasing tincture to every object with which they conversed, and while they extolled it with their hearts and lips, they as yet found favour with all the people. The natural enmity of the heart against the gospel of Christ did not at first shew itself, and the purity of their lives could not but recommend them to the esteem of others. “The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” Thus St. Luke intimates whose grace it was that affected all this, and that his hand, in the out-pouring here described, ought ever to be acknowledged.

A miracle wrought soon after by Peter and John on a lame man, a well-known beggar above forty years old, gave a farther attestation to their doctrine. Peter was led from hence to preach* to the admiring multitude the same doctrine of repentance and remission, and exalted the Lord Jesus, as the Holy One, and the Just, and the Prince of Life, to whom they had wickedly preferred even a murderer, Barabbas. He disclaims all merit in himself or his colleagues in the miracle, shews that God had glorified his Son Jesus, and that it was through faith in his name, that the act had been performed. He charitably alleges their ignorance, as the only possible alleviation of their guilt, and which indeed alone prevented it from be-

* Acts iii.

ing unpardonable. He exhorts them to repentance and conversion, and lays open to their view the prospect not of a temporal, but of a spiritual kingdom; in the hope of which they were to rejoice, and patiently bear the afflictions of this present life; warning them at the same time of the threats denounced by Moses against the despisers of the Messiah, through whom alone salvation was offered to all nations, though the first invitation was addressed to the Jews.

The church was now increased to five thousand; and the signal for persecution was raised by the magistrates of Jerusalem, many of whom were Sadducees, enemies to the doctrine of a resurrection, and 'n truth to every thing that had any tendency to raise men's minds above the world. The two apostles were imprisoned that evening, but their examination was deferred till the next day. The high priest, and the persons of greatest authority, looked on the matter as of consequence sufficient to call a solemn court on the occasion. Peter to their interrogatories frankly answers, that the miracle had been "wrought in the name of Jesus, whom ye crucified, whom God "raised from the dead." He boldly rebukes them for their contempt of him, who is the only Saviour: For "there is none other name under heaven given "to men, whereby we must be saved."

The wisdom and boldness of two unlettered fishermen, who had been companions of Jesus, struck the court with astonishment. But finding no present opportunity of gratifying their malice, on account of the splendor of the miracle, they dismissed them with a strict charge to be silent in future concerning the name of Jesus, though the apostles ingenuously confessed their inability to comply with it, because they must obey God rather than man.

* The apostles returning to their company, and reporting the threats of the magistrates, they all with united supplication intreated the Lord to grant them boldness to persevere, notwithstanding the menaces of his and their enemies. They were filled with the

Holy Ghost, and enabled to proceed with calm intrepidity.

The most perfect unanimity as yet prevailed among the christians, and they not only professed to have all things common, but also practised it accordingly with the greatest cheerfulness. Divine Grace was largely diffused among them. The poor lacked nothing; the richer brethren converted their possessions into money, and left the distribution of the whole to the discretion of the apostles. And in this liberality Barnabas of Cyprus, a Levite who had lands of his own, most probably in his native country, was eminently distinguished.

It appeared, that the apostles enjoyed much more of the power of Christ's religion than they had ever done while their Master was with them on earth. Such was the effect of the out-pouring of the Spirit. We hear no more of their dreams concerning a temporal kingdom. The courage of Peter in confronting the magistrates, forms a perfect contrast to his timidity in denying his Master. Wherever the same repentance, faith, hope, charity, heavenly-mindedness appear, there is true christianity, there also the enmity of the world will be excited. Of this something has already appeared, and more is now calling for our attention, as well as something much more grievous, the detection of hypocrisy in some professors.

The case of Judas had already prepared the church to expect the appearance of tares among the wheat, and our Lord's parable alluded to, had assured them of it. Yet when such things occur, good men are often too much surprized, and the wicked unreasonably triumph. There was one Ananias among the disciples, whose conscience had so far been impressed, as to respect that doctrine and fellowship to which he had joined himself, but whose heart was never divorced from the love of the world. A regard for his reputation induced him to sell his possessions with the rest; but the fear of poverty and the want of faith in God disposed him to reserve part of the price, while he brought the other to the apostles.

Peter upbraided him with his being under the influence of Satan, in lying to the Holy Ghost ; shewed him that the guilt of his hypocrisy was aggravated by this consideration, that the action was committed not against man but against God ; and that nothing could be said to extenuate his baseness, because he was under no necessity of selling his property at all, or of laying it at the apostle's feet, after he had sold it. Immediately the unhappy man fell down dead ; and about three hours after his wife Sapphira was made a similar monument of Divine Justice, as she had been partaker of her husband's guilt.

Such a proof of the discernment of spirits, and of the power of punishing hypocrisy, resting in the governors of the church, filled all who heard these things with awe. The Lord had now shewn his holiness as well as his grace ; and the love of the world, the standing heresy which infects his church in all ages, was a second time punished by a signal interposition of heaven. Multitudes of both sexes were added to the church chiefly of the common people. Of the rest indeed, though some could not but entertain favourable sentiments of them, yet none durst hazard his character among the rich and great, so far as to espouse christianity.*

The Sadducees appear at this time to have had the chief sway in the Jewish state, a licentious, worldly minded sect, and in their opinions the most corrupt of all those which at that time were known in Judea. The high priest and his party were all of this sect, and were filled with indignation, to see the progress of the gospel. Their first step was to imprison the apostles, who by night were, through the ministry of an angel, set free, and ordered to preach in the temple. The next morning a full Sanhedrim was convened, and the apostles were sent for. The court was astonished to find them escaped out of prison ; they were soon however informed, that their prisoners were preaching in the temple. The favourable regard of the common people obliged them

to use some address in conducting their prisoners in a gentle manner before the court. The high priest upbraids them with their disobedience to the former injunction of silence, to whom they returned their former answer that "they ought to obey God rather than men." They bore witness to the resurrection of Christ, and declared that "God had exalted him with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins," and that "the Holy Ghost, whom God bestows on those who obey him, witnessed" the same thing. With such plainness did these first christians lay open the real nature of the gospel, and exhibit it as something extremely different from a mere system of morals, though it included all good morality in its nature. The testimony of Jesus, the forgiveness of sins through his blood, and the operations of the Holy Ghost, as they were doubtless the peculiar characteristics of christianity, so they were those things which most offended the Jewish rulers, and have been indeed the chief object of the enmity of unconverted men in all ages.

The spirit of persecution was going to exercise itself in violent counsels. There was however one Gamaliel among them, a Pharisee, of a sect not indeed inimical to the doctrine of a resurrection, and by no means so heterodox in general as the Sadducees, though on the whole agreeing with them in their hatred of christianity. This man was judicious, learned, respectable, though, as far as appears, a man of the world. Providence made an important use of him, at this time, to prolong twelve most valuable lives, who were to spread the gospel through the world, and by their inspired writings, (not one of which was yet published,) to speak to us at this day. Gamaliel shewed them by some authentic historical precedents, that persons who rose up to propagate new sects, if not sent of God, were soon annihilated. He wished them to exercise forbearance and moderation toward the apostles, whose influence would soon come to nothing, if it were merely human ; if

divine, to attempt its destruction would be equally foolish and impious. This sage advice was followed, and the apostles were dismissed, but not without stripes, and a severe charge given them, no more to preach in the name of Jesus. They ceased not however to "teach and preach Jesus Christ, and rejoiced "that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his "name."

The church was now much enlarged, consisting partly of native, partly of foreign Jews, who used the Greek language, called on that account Hellenists or Grecians. These supposed, that in the daily supply of the poor, the apostles had not ministered equal relief to their widows, as to those of the Hebrews. Men who know any thing of the work of God, in the visitation of his Holy Spirit, in great and populous cities, and have any acquaintance with the fulness of employ, which christian ministers have on such occasions, in instructing, warning, consoling, and directing awakened and serious minds, will not wonder, if through inadvertence some temporary neglects might have taken place. The apostles however, with great mildness and wisdom, soon regulated this affair. They inform the disciples that the ministry of the word of God must be attended to in the first place, and must not be neglected for the sake of providing for the poor. They advise them therefore to look out for seven holy and wise men, to whom this business should be committed. "But we," say they, "will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the "ministry of the word."* O that those, who call themselves their successors, were always disposed in like manner! The whole multitude consented with pleasure. Seven deacons were amicably elected, Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, every one of whom has a Grecian name, and therefore may have been an Hellenist; and in this easy way the first appearances of contention were blasted in the church, and seven coadjutors were appointed to the apostles, some of whom at least were

* Acts vi.

of signal service, not only in temporal, but also in spiritual things. So happy is it to be under the conduct of the Holy Spirit, and so amiably did the love of Christ then rule in the hearts of his people. Even many of the priests now obeyed the gospel, and Jerusalem saw continually large accessions made to the church.

Of these deacons Stephen was at first the most distinguished. A synagogue of Hellenist Jews held a contest with him, the result of which filled them with such vexation, that they suborned men to accuse him of blasphemy against Moses and against God. By this artifice Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrim, while God threw a lustre over his countenance, which even his enemies could not but observe. In his defence he boldly rebuked the Jews, and shewed that their conduct was but too faithful a copy of that of their fathers, who had treated Moses and the prophets with contempt, and had murdered a number of those who had prophesied of the coming of the Just One, of whom they had now been the betrayers and murderers, while they vainly gloried in the magnificence of their temple, and put external services in the room of genuine piety.

Thus did Stephen aim at the same point with Peter, to convince his audience of sin in the first place, and to leave them no hope in their own righteousness. Seldom has the contrast between the Spirit of the World and the Spirit of God appeared more striking. "They were cut to the heart, and gnashed upon with their teeth." But he, "full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly to heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God," and what he saw, he openly confessed. Their patience was exhausted, and they stoned him to death, while he called upon his Divine Master, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Thus firm and constant was his faith, and his charity was no less conspicuous. He kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge;" thus shewing how entirely void of all malice were

those vehement rebukes which he had uttered against their wickedness, and which men of pusillanimous prudence are in all ages disposed to condemn. And when he had said this, he fell asleep,* the usual beautiful phrase of the New Testament, to express the death of saints, and at the same time to intimate their expectation of the resurrection.

The eloquence of a Cicero would be mere feebleness on this occasion. All praise is below the excellency of that spirit which shone in this first of martyrs. Let it stand as an example of the genuine temper of martyrdom, of real faith in Christ, and of real charity to men, and let heroes of the world hide their heads in confusion.

Judea seems to have been at this time without a procurator. Pontius Pilate had been disgraced, and Vitellius, the governor of Syria, was a man of great moderation toward the Jews. In these circumstances the mildness of the Roman government was eventually the occasion of a severe persecution to the church. The Jewish magistrates, who a little before had not the power of life and death, and could not murder the Lord of Life without the intervention of their Roman masters, were now left to themselves, at least in religious concerns, and Stephen was the first christian victim. He was buried with great lamentation by the church, and a considerable number suffered soon after.

A young man called Saul, an Hellenist† of Tarsus, a person of an active ambitious spirit, who had been educated at Jerusalem under Gamaliel, and outstripped all his equals in Judaical learning distinguished himself in this persecution. He took care of the clothes of the witnesses who were employed in stoning Stephen,‡ and made havock of the church, entering into “every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison, and when they were put to death, he gave his voice against them.” In truth, the dis-

* Acts vii.

† That is one born and bred a Jew in some country where the Greek language was spoken.

‡ Acts viii.

ciples seemed now to be left to the rage of men disposed to shew them no mercy ; and a superficial observer might have supposed, that the fate of Theudas and Judas, mentioned by Gamaliel, was going to attend the christians. Men had not yet learned, that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church. The religious worship of the disciples must have suffered a grievous interruption. Indeed none of them found it safe to remain there. The apostles alone thought good to stand their ground, and by the watchful care of their God they were preserved. The dispersed christians preached the word wherever they went. And thus this persecution was the first occasion of the diffusion of the gospel through various regions, and what was meant to annihilate it, was overruled to extend it exceedingly. But we shall confine ourselves in this section to the church of Jerusalem.

Saul, who was all attention to the work of persecution, was vexed to hear, that a number of the christians had escaped to Damascus, an ancient city of Syria, and procured a commission from the high priest to bring them bound to Jerusalem. It was a considerable journey, but religious glory was his idol. When he was near to Damascus, a sudden light from heaven, exceeding even that of the sun,* arrested the daring zealot, and struck him to the ground. At the same time a voice called to him, saying, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord ; and the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest : It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." In this marvellous manner did the Son of God make known his truth, his majesty, and his power to this enterprising persecutor, and evince to all ages what he can do to the "praise of the glory of his grace." The will of Saul was broken, and made submissive to God for the first time, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do," was his cry ; and whenever this is uttered from the heart, it will not fail to bring down the divine blessing. He was directed to go into Damascus, where he remained three days without sight and without food, yet constantly employ-

* Acts ix.

ed in prayer for divine grace and mercy. Thus conviction of sin was preached to him, attended with circumstances more extraordinary, but of the same kind as that which had been preached to the three thousand first converts. For though a work of converting grace may vary very much in its circumstances, yet its nature must ever be the same. The grace of forgiveness by Jesus Christ would have been no welcome news to this Pharisee, had he still remained in the confidence of his own righteousness; but now it was as life from the dead. After three days, by the particular direction of a vision from the Lord Jesus, Ananias, a disciple of Damascus, was sent to him with the tidings of peace. He had heard of the active malice of Saul, but was encouraged to go by a positive declaration that Saul was a chosen vessel. He opened his commission by informing him, that the Lord Jesus had sent him, to the end that he might receive his sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. Both immediately took place. Ananias exhorted him to delay no longer, but to "wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord."* He was baptized, and soon refreshed both in mind and body; and from that time the whole vehemence of his natural character, and the whole power of his intellectual faculties, which were doubtless of the first magnitude among men, were sanctified to the service of Jesus Christ, and he was engaged in a course of labours with unparalleled success in the church to his death. For this is he who is commonly known by the name of St. Paul, and his memorial is blessed forever. He was particularly commissioned to preach to the Gentiles, and of all the apostles he seems to have entered with the greatest penetration into the nature of christianity. Salvation by grace through faith was his darling theme, a doctrine diametrically opposite to the self-righteous scheme in which he had been wont to glory. His countrymen the Jews were particularly fierce in opposing this, and were stung to the quick to find the loss of their favourite champion. No doubt he had been sincere in his religion; yet is he far from exculpating

* Acts xxii. 16.

himself on this account. On the contrary he magnifies the grace of the Lord Jesus, as extended to him, a blasphemer, a persecutor, injurious, and the chief of sinners,* in whom the long-suffering of the Lord had been exhibited, for a pattern to them, who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting; that mankind may know that God accepts sinners on Christ's account alone, and through faith in his blood, and that nothing can be more contrary to the whole design of the gospel, than to seek salvation by their own works of any kind. He seems ever after to have lamented deeply the miserable state of his countrymen, who "had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge."† He pitied their self-righteous state; he knew how deceitful a state it was to those who were under the power of it, by his own experience; and while he rejoiced on account of that grace which had redeemed himself from hell, he commiserated those who were fast advancing thither in fearless presumption. In the third chapter of the Philippians he gives us a very particular view of himself. To trust in any thing for salvation, except Christ alone, is with him to "have confidence in the flesh." No man seemed once to have had more just pretensions for such confidence than he. His regular circumcision on the eighth day, Hebrew descent, Pharisaic strictness, zealous Judaism, and blameless morals, seemed to exalt him above the common level of his countrymen; but he declares that he "reckoned all these things "as dung, that he might win Christ;" and in him alone he desires to be found without his own righteousness to trust in, and maintains the settled determination of his soul in this article of justification. Were it not for the perverse blindness of fallen nature, one might be astonished to hear, after the view of such an account of himself, so many persons of learning and good sense still endeavouring to represent him as mixing grace and works in the subject of justification, and describing him as only excluding ceremonial works from the office of justifying a sinner. But to proceed:

* 1 Tim. i.

† Rom. x.

Having preached Christ for three years abroad, he went up to Jerusalem. Here he attempted to join himself to the church, but the remembrance of what he had been, and the very imperfect account which they had of what he then was, prevented the christians from receiving him, till Barnabas brought him to the apostles, (two of them only, Peter, and James* the Lord's brother,) and informed them of his genuine conversion. This cleared up all doubts, and he was now engaged in the work of the ministry there, and would gladly have remained at Jerusalem; but the Lord by a vision assured him, that the Jews would not receive his testimony, and that the great scene of his labours was to be among the Gentiles.

In fact, some address was needful in his brethren to save his life from the rage of the Jews, and he was conducted to his native city of Tarsus. By this time however the fury of persecution subsided; the Lord gave rest to his church, and the disciples both at Jerusalem and elsewhere walked in the very best manner, in which they can walk on this side heaven, "in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost." Where these go together, excesses of all sorts are prevented; and inward joy and outward obedience conspire to demonstrate, that there Christ reigns indeed.

Yet so slow are men to receive new divine truths, especially those which militate against old prejudices, that the christians of Jerusalem contended with Peter on account of his intercourse with the Gentiles of Cæsarea. The fierceness of Peter's natural character was now abated; with great meekness he reasoned on the case with his bigoted brethren, and convinced them by the evident proofs of the Grace of God being vouchsafed to Gentiles, that it was lawful to have communion with them.† They glorified God saying, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance to life." Unutterable grace indeed to us, confessed at length and owned by our elder brethren the Jews! David had just reason to say, "Let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercies are great, and let me not

* Gal. i. 18, 19.

† Acts xi.

“fall into the hands of man.”* Even a converted Jew admits with difficulty, that the Grace of God may visit a Gentile.

The visits of Paul to Jerusalem seem to have been but short. The body of the Jewish nation sought his destruction, and his Gentile connexions and very moderate practice of Mosaical ceremonies, rendered him no peculiar favourite in the mother church, though they “could not “but glorify the Grace of God which was in him.”† But the church is not perfect on earth. His next return to Jerusalem was however of a popular kind, to convey the alms of Gentile converts to the Jewish christians oppressed by a “famine, which came to pass in “the days of Claudius Cæsar.”‡ His companion to Jerusalem was Barnabas, whose liberality in the beginning had been so eminent. This service being discharged, they both returned to minister to the Gentiles.

The civil power of Judea was now in the hands of Herod Agrippa, a great favourite of the Roman Emperor, a person of considerable talents, and full of that specious virtue, which in secular annals would entitle him to great renown; in the church of Christ he stands a persecutor, and his virtues are in the strong, but just language of Augustine, *splendida peccata*.§ Yet his persecution was not the effect of a cruel temper. Had the Jews regarded christianity with a favourable eye, he at least would have protected it. But long before this time the general favour of the common people toward the christians had been dissipated by the active malice of the rulers, and Christ was found to have no lasting friends, but those whom he made so by effectual grace. The first victim of this politic persecution was James the son of Zebedee; he was slain with the sword, the first of the apostles, who departed from the church below, to join that which is above.

Finding that the act was popular, Herod attempted to dispatch Peter also.|| But God had reserved him for more services, and yet in all appearance there was

* 2 Sam. xxiv. 14. † Gal. i. ult.

§ Splendid sins.

+ Acts xi. toward the end.

|| Acts xii.

no hope of his preservation. He was imprisoned and strictly guarded, with a view, after the passover, when the concourse of Jews at Jerusalem was very large, to have him publicly executed. The king pleased himself with the idea of ingratiating himself with his subjects; but the church has arms which men of the world understand not, and they were vigorously used on this occasion.

A spirit of earnest persevering prayer was poured on the church of Jerusalem. The Lord delayed to answer, till the critical moment; a method not uncommon of exercising the faith, and zeal, and patience of his people. By the miraculous interposition of an angel, he was, the night before his intended execution, delivered from prison. At first he imagined that to be done in vision, which was a reality. At length being fully come to himself, and reflecting on what the Lord had done, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John Mark, a woman of eminent piety and some opulence, where many christians were gathered together in the divine employment of prayer. Those only who know what the spirit of prayer is, can conceive the vehemence of wrestling, which then engaged christian hearts. The scene which followed was at once most astonishing, and most pleasing. They hear a person knocking at the door, a young woman named Rhoda comes to hearken, she knows Peter's voice, joy prevents her from opening the gate, she returns to inform the supplicants, that Peter stood before it; they are induced to suspect her of insanity, rather than to believe that their prayers were heard; so slow are even the best to believe the goodness of God. She perseveres in her first assertion; it must then, say they, be his angel.* Peter continues knocking; they open at length, behold him, and are astonished. Having waved his hand, and brought them to silence, he informs them of the Lord's wonderful interposition in his favour. Go, says he, and shew these things to James, and the brethren. James, who

* The idea of the ministry of angels among men was popular with the Jews; possibly these good men might carry it too far.

was the Lord's brother, with himself and John, had the greatest concern in the government of the mother church at that time.* Peter retires then to a place of concealment.

Little did Herod apprehend that his own death should precede that of his prisoner. On a public occasion, in which he appeared in great splendor, he delivered an oration, so pleasing to his audience, "that they shouted, "it is the voice of a god and not of a man." That moment he was smitten with an incurable disease by an angel, because he "gave not God the glory." That pride and ambition, which had gained him the character of a patriot, orator, and statesman, were punished with death by Him, who "seeth not as man seeth," and he fell a warning to princes not to seek glory in opposition to God.

The next memorable circumstance in the mother church was "the first christian council," which will deserve our particular attention. The controversy which occasioned it, involved a subject of vast consequence in real religion.

† About twenty years had elapsed since the out-pouring of the Spirit had commenced, a period of time, in which, even in the midst of one of the most wicked nations in the world, God had erected his kingdom in the hearts of thousands, in Jerusalem and the neighbourhood, who had lived in great unanimity and charity, "keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace," conscious of their Divine Master's spiritual presence, and rejoicing in hope of his second coming to complete their felicity. They had sustained in his strength, with much patience, two very severe persecutions, in the former of which a deacon, in the second an apostle, had sealed the truth with his blood. In an earlier part of this period their holy harmony had been a little inter-

* Gal. ii. 9.

† I once for all observe here, that the niceties of chronology make no part of my study in this work. Yet I shall endeavour to attend so much to historical connexion, as to be generally right within a few years. This seems sufficient for my purpose, and whoever attends to the second and third chapters to the Galatians, will see, that I cannot err much in this instance.

rupted by a secular contention ; but this was soon composed. The time was not yet arrived, when those, who called themselves christians, could so much forget the dignity of their profession, as to contend passionately for worldly things. The present controversy had a more intimate connexion with the christian religion itself, and therefore seemed more likely to disturb the union of men, with whom spiritual objects were the chief ground of concern. The Jews were strongly attached to their own religious national peculiarities. Under the influence of pride, envy, and other evil passions, this disposition supported the spirit of self-righteousness. Nothing could be more contrary to the genius of the gospel than the attempt of some christian Jews, who endeavoured to infuse into the Gentile converts an idea of the necessity of circumcision, and of obedience to the whole of the Mo-saic ceremonial, in order to salvation. Some of the Pharisees themselves were now real christians, but they were displeased to see and hear of so many Gentiles admitted into the christian church, and regarded by the apostles as on an equal footing with themselves in the favour of God. Thus were their minds darkened with respect to the article of justification ; and before they were aware, by thus insisting on the necessity of circumcision, they practically averred, that the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was not sufficient for man's salvation, that the favour of God was to be purchased by human works in part at least, and that they by their ritual observances contributed to their acceptance with God.

This was the first time that the natural pride and ignorance of the human heart, disguised under the pretence of religious zeal, attempted to undermine the simplicity of the faith, by which hitherto christians had rested with complacency on Jesus alone, had enjoyed peace of conscience, and had been constrained to obedience by love. The apostles Paul and Barnabas looked on the growing evil with a jealous eye, and after no small fruitless altercation with the zealots, thought it best to refer the full consideration of the question to a council of apostles and elders at Jerusalem. And now Paul returned to Jerusalem the third time since his conver-

sion, and about seventeen years after it; and in his progress with Barnabas, reported the conversion of the Gentiles, which gave great joy to the christian Jews in general.

At the council Peter, who was returned to Jerusalem, and since Agrippa's death was no longer molested, opened the debate by observing, that a considerable time ago, God had selected him to preach to the Gentiles, and had blessed his labours with unequivocal success, in purifying their hearts by faith, and in dispensing the Holy Ghost among them, no less than on the Jews. After God himself had thus decided, he said it appeared presumptuous in any to impose a yoke on the Gentiles, from which the divine indulgence had exempted them. He insisted that the yoke itself, especially when laid on the conscience as necessary to salvation, was intolerable; and concluded that even they, who still, for charitable and prudential reasons, persisted in the ritual observances, were yet obliged to separate them from the conscience, and to repose for salvation only on the "Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ," as well as these Gentiles, who never had observed them at all. This full testimony of Peter was supported by Paul and Barnabas, who gave large proof of the divine grace vouchsafed to Gentiles. James, who seems to have been the standing pastor of Jerusalem, confirmed the same argument, by the prophets of the Old Testament, agreeably to Peter's declaration of the mercy of God in visiting the Gentiles. He gave his opinion, that the Gentiles should no longer be molested with notions subversive of the grace of God and tending to teach them dependence on human works instead of the atonement of Christ for salvation. Only he recommended, that the council should direct them to abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.* For the number of Jews dispersed through Gentile cities, and who

* Though an idol was nothing, and what was offered to it was nothing, yet St. Paul has given solid reasons why christians should abstain from such meats. Fornication was a sin, concerning the evil of which

heard Moses read every Sabbath-day, required these precautions.

A letter was sent according to these views, nor does it appear that there was one dissenting voice in the council. It is remarkable, that the synod used this striking expression of censure against the zealots, they "troubled you with words, subverting your souls." Certainly the charitable apostles would not so strongly have rebuked a trifling error. Nor is there, I think, any other method of understanding this aright, but on the principles already stated, that the harm did not lie in the ceremonies themselves, virtually abrogated as they all were by the death of Christ, and which the apostles themselves, some of them who lived in Judea constantly, the rest occasionally practised, but in the dependence for salvation placed on them, in opposition to the grace of Christ. Here they knew it behoved them to be jealous, that God might be glorified, and souls comforted; and the joy, and consolation, and establishment in the faith,* which ensued amongst the Gentiles, confirms this interpretation.

It is to be feared, that the church of Jerusalem received not all the benefit from the wisdom and charity of the council, which was to be wished; though it doubtless would be of service to many. But its most wholesome effects were felt among the Gentiles. The account which we have in the Epistle to the Galatians leads us to suspect, that the self-righteous spirit had a very deep influence among some members of the church at Jerusalem. The apostle Paul was obliged to exercise a particular caution among them, and to confer in private with the pillars of the church, lest he should give umbrage to the Jewish christians, and hurt his own usefulness among his countrymen.† In this he acted with equal prudence and charity; yet nothing could induce him to act inconsistently with the faith. To press the Gentile converts to Jewish conformity, ap-

the heathen converts might be apprehended as yet uninformed; and to abstain from things strangled and from blood, was necessary, in order to have any intercourse with Jews at all.

* Acts xv. 31. and xvi. 5.

† Gal. ii.

peared to him in this light, as no reasons but those of peace, charity, and prudential expediency could be pleaded for the continuance of such observances even among Jews; and therefore among Gentiles, who never had been under the yoke, no other construction could be put on the practice, than that it was necessary to salvation, and that the primary doctrine of the christian religion, the sufficiency of the blood of Christ for pardon of sin was disbelieved. The apostle therefore, who on another occasion circumcised Timothy* because of the Jews in the neighbourhood, he being by the mother's side of Hebrew extraction, now insisted, that Titus, a perfect Gentile, should not be circumcised,† because of false brethren, who had craftily introduced themselves among the christians, with a view to undermine their dependence on Jesus, and to draw them back to the self-righteousness of Judaism. The liberty of Christ was what he was zealous to support, and he would not for an hour allow any self-righteous mixtures, “that the truth of the gospel might continue with them;” an expression which throws farther light on the controversy we have reviewed, and shews that not circumcision itself, but the dependence on it for salvation, in the room of Christ, was the great object of the apostle's opposition.

He had hitherto found, to his satisfaction, that all his brethren of the apostolic college had heartily concurred in checking the progress of self-righteousness. But a lamentable instance of human imbecility soon appeared. Peter, after having ‡ taken a social meal with some Gentile converts, afterwards withdrew from their company, on the arrival of some Jewish zealots, who came to him from James; and thus, for fear of their censure, he durst not keep company with men, whose fellowship he yet inwardly revered, and expected to enjoy in heaven. An error committed by a respectable character is infectious. Other Jews dissembled with him; even Barnabas was carried away with their dissimulation, and the truth of the gospel was in danger

* Acts xvi. 3.

† Gal. ii.

‡ Gal. ii. 12.

of being forsaken on the authority of those, who had hitherto upheld its standard in the world. Such infirmities of the wise and good shew, to whom alone we are obliged for the preservation of christian truth in the earth. The Lord roused the spirit of Paul on the occasion; he vindicated the truth of the gospel by an open and manly rebuke of Peter, and a check was put to the growing torrent of Pharisaism, that dark but deadly foe of the gospel, which in one form or other is ever ready to cloud the light of truth, and to sap the foundation of christian peace and life.

St. Paul's fourth visit to Jerusalem is but just mentioned.* His fifth was attended with more memorable events. It was seen by the spirit of prophecy, that he would undergo bitter persecution from the infidel Jews; and the guarded kindness with which he was received by many, even of the believers there, formed no pleasing inducement to him to repeat his visits. But divine charity prevailed over all; he rebuked his friends at Cæsarea, who dissuaded him from prosecuting his journey, by professing his readiness "not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus."† His resignation silenced them; they said, "The will of the Lord be done." On his arrival he waited on James, and in the presence of all the elders recounted the work of God among the Gentiles. They glorified the Lord, and rejoiced sincerely on the account; but at the same time expressed what concern it gave them to find, how jealous of Paul the brethren were, having heard a false report of his teaching all the Jews to forsake the Mosaic observances. Doubtless he had not done this; but he had done what displeased the Jewish zealots, he had insisted on the exemption of Gentiles from the yoke, and men once out of humour are disposed to hearken to malevolent exaggerations. In this exigency the advice of James was at once prudent and charitable, that he should join with four men, who were bound by a Nazarite vow in the customary services of the temple, till a sacrifice should be offered

* Acts xviii. 22.

† Acts xxi. 18.

for each of them. With this Paul concurred, and gave the clearest proof that he knew how to conform both to Jew and Gentile in things indifferent, with a view to promote the salvation of men. A few remarks on this subject shall bring it to a close.

1. We see here that really there was no difference of sentiment between Paul and James in religious opinions, as from a few* expressions in the Epistle of the latter some are glad to insinuate. These two apostles, and indeed the whole college, were perfectly agreed in their views of the nature of the gospel.

2. In Peter there evidently was, in one instance, a duplicity of conduct with respect to the Mosaic rites, in Paul a steady uniformity. He lived as a Jew himself; vows, synagogue-worship, and the various rites of the law he observed, not even sacrifices excepted, on occasion. He could not indeed look on them now in any other light than as branches of an human establishment; since the death of Christ had annulled their divine authority. The establishment itself he knew was soon to cease by the destruction of Jerusalem. To him and to the rest of the apostles it appeared more charitable, to submit to the inconveniences of conformity, than to irritate the whole body of the Jews on account of circumstances. On this ground pious men in all ages have acted, and those who have most excelled in christian fruitfulness, have been most remarkable for their candour. At the same time the inflexible firmness of Paul in vindicating the doctrine of justification, by allowing on no account the circumcision of Gentiles, informs us, where he laid the stress for salvation. This union of candour and firmness in the same person, acting variously in opposite circumstances, has led some writers to accuse him of inconsistency, who seem not to have understood the principles of the controversy. This was the case of Jerom of old. His controversy with Augustin on the subject is yet extant in the epistles of the latter, whose statement of the affair I think perfectly just, and it is agreeable to the views in which the conduct of the apostle has now been exhibited.

* James ii. latter part.

3. We see here how infinitely important the doctrine of justification is : What excellent fruits it had brought forth* in the Jewish Church, now consisting of many thousands, has been shewn. It appears how naturally the human heart departs from the faith of Christ, before it is aware. The penetrating and zealous spirit of Paul was employed by the divine goodness, to uphold still the standard of truth. Many, no doubt, received benefit from his example ; but the glory of this church was now rather sinking.

4. The evil of bigotry is no less evident, and how naturally it connects itself with self-righteousness is apparent. An eager stress laid on any rite, or form, or external work whatever, easily thus degenerates. Steadfastness in the faith, and candour, and charity, are, under God, our preservatives against it.

There was little opportunity of trying the effect of the charitable scheme concerted between the two apostles on the minds of christians, because before the seven days were expired, the malice of the infidel Jews broke out against him. St. Luke's narrative from the twenty-first chapter to the end of his history, is spent on the consequences of this. With what cheerfulness, magnanimity, charity, and piety the apostle behaved, what power of conviction the Lord gave to his word in throwing a Roman governor into a fit of trembling, and in inducing a king to confess his almost conviction of christianity, with what providential care his person was guarded from Jewish malice by his privilege of Roman citizenship, and what perils he underwent by sea and land, till he arrived a prisoner at Rome, and there for two years laboured in the ministry among them who visited him in his imprisonment ; these things are so circumstantially, and, I may justly add, so beautifully related by the sacred writer, that I shall refer my reader to him altogether, especially as neither the history of the mother church, nor of any other particular churches, is connected with the account.

The malice of the Jews having failed of its object in Paul by his appeal to Cæsar, would gladly have gratified

* Acts xxi. 20.

itself on James. But he, though no Roman citizen, was shielded by the lenity of the Roman government a little longer. His long residence at Jerusalem, where he was stationary at least for the most part, had given him an opportunity, by a blameless life, to abate the prejudice of his unbelieving countrymen, and to extort the tribute of praise from the populace in general. About the year of our Lord 60, he wrote his catholic epistle. It is addressed to Jews in general; sometimes he speaks to christians, sometimes to infidels, like a person well known, and of considerable influence among both. The covetousness, inhumanity, and persecuting spirit of the nation are described in strong colours, and he writes like one who foresees the speedy desolation which was to overtake them. By the practical turn of his doctrine, by his descanting on the vices of the tongue,* their partiality to the rich, and contemptuous treatment of the poor in christian assemblies,† and his direction against vain swearing,‡ it is but too evident, that the church had considerably declined from its original purity and simplicity; and that the crafts of Satan, aided ever by natural depravity, were wearing out apace the precious fruits of that “out-pouring” of the Spirit, which has been described. Such is the common course of things in all similar cases, within the like period of about thirty years. The Lord had not however forsaken his church; and the members of it were in a persecuted state, and were brought before Jewish magistrates,§ and vexed, so far as the rage of this infatuated nation had power to exert itself. He particularly exhorts them to patience under their trials, and a resignation to the divine will.

About the same time, or a little after, this church was favoured with the Epistle to the Hebrews, which seems to have been written by St. Paul.||

As apostacy, partly through the fashionable and natural evil of self-righteousness, and partly through the cruelty of persecution, was the great evil to be feared

* Chap. iii. † Chap. ii. ‡ Chap. v. § Chap. ii. 6.

|| St. Peter in his Second Epistle to the Jews, reminds them of St. Paul's letter to them, which could have been no other than this Epistle.

among them, he directs them particularly to maintain the christian faith. He largely and distinctly shews the accomplishment of all Mosaic types in Jesus. His priesthood, sacrifice, and intercession are amply described. The privileges and benefits of his salvation are distinctly stated. He exhorts them to constancy in the simple faith of Christ. He recommends them to persevere in supporting their christian assemblies, from which some* had declined, probably through fear of persecution. He reminds them of the severities they had patiently undergone after their first illumination, of the compassion which his sufferings had excited among them, and how cheerfully they had endured the spoiling of their goods, from the confidence they “had of a better and enduring substance.” The whole turn of his exhortation shews, that they were in a state of grievous molestation at the time of writing this Epistle. And yet from their dulness in divine things, very strongly reprehended,† it is certain the spiritual taste was declined. The persecution of St. Paul at Jerusalem probably excited a general hostility against the church. That it did not proceed to blood,‡ seems owing to no other cause than the protection of the Roman government. He is particularly earnest in exhorting them to remember and hold fast the grace of the gospel, which their first ministers had taught them, to consider that Jesus Christ was their great object, and that a return to Jewish dependencies would ruin their souls. On the whole, we have here the most glorious views of the gospel, and the most distinct information of the nature of a true adherence to it; though I see no evidence on the face of the Epistle for concluding, that he forbade them that same occasional and prudential compliance with Judaism in external observances, which all the apostles practised. It was the departure of the heart from the Lord Jesus, against which he warned them. He dwells not largely on particular duties. He had not lived much among them, and special details of practical matters came better from the pastoral pen of James.

* Heb. x. 25. † v. 12. ‡ xii. 4.

Thus earnestly did these two apostles instruct and warn a declining church. But grace has its seasons ! God will not always strive with man ; yet the use of the epistles will remain, till time shall be no more.

SECTION II.

Judea and Galilee.

THE holy land was divided into three provinces, JUDEA, GALILEE, and SAMARIA. This last was in a situation so peculiar, as to deserve to be considered distinctly. And of the churches of the two former I have not much more to say, than that their state, by fair analogy, may be estimated from that of the mother church. Indeed a strong foundation had been laid for their conversion by the ministry of John the Baptist, and by that of our Lord in the days of his flesh. The angel Gabriel had foretold of the son of Zacharias, “ that “ many of the children of Israel he should turn to the “ Lord their God.”* Repentance was his theme, and by this he prepared the way of the Lord. Jesus himself condescended in his subordinate capacity of prophet and teacher to pursue the same method, though no regular churches were yet formed. He promised that the gift of the Holy Ghost should be vouchsafed to his disciples, and we have several intimations,† that a greater degree of success, of purity, of knowledge, and of glory, should attend his religion after he should leave this world than during his personal ministry.‡

Judea and Galilee being thus prepared for the gospel, the blessed tidings began to be spread through them, and to be attended with rapid success, soon after the first persecution which arose about Stephen. Those who had felt the flame of divine love in Jerusalem,

* Luke i. 2.

† John xiv. and xvi.

‡ Let this account once for all, for the much greater use which I make of the Acts and of the Epistles, than of the four Gospels. These last are indeed inestimable ; but their uses are of another kind, and fall not within the plan of this work.

being obliged to flee, preached through these regions, and many thousands were converted, as we have seen. The mother church, no doubt, was the most numerous, but various churches in the country must have contributed to make up the sum. The small size of Palestine may tempt some to wonder, if many thousands became christians, how the main body of the nation could yet remain in infidelity. The amazing populousness and fertility of the country accounts for this. The number of populous towns, in Galilee particularly, is astonishing, as appears from Josephus' narrative of the Jewish war. The single town of Gadara, near the lake of Gennezaret, by no means a town of the first magnitude, maintained two thousand swine.* If then the importance of regions be measured by the number of inhabitants, rather than by the extent of ground, this small country might vie perhaps with modern Russia.

Of these churches the first instruments were not the apostles themselves, though they doubtless visited them afterwards, and confirmed them. James the son of Zebedee would not confine his labours to Jerusalem, till the time of his martyrdom, no more than the rest of the twelve, if perhaps we except James, the son of Alphaeus, who was the first standing pastor of Jerusalem.

These churches most probably followed the example of the parent church, both in its first love and comfortable progress, and also in its unhappy declension. Peter's activity in establishing them was very conspicuous. "The Lord wrought effectually" in him for the conversion of the Jews all along.† He passed through all quarters, and visited the places most remote from the capital, such as Lydda, Saron, and Joppa.‡ In all these places the Spirit of God accompanied his work. It was in this last city that the Lord by him raised Tabitha from the dead. I should scarce have mentioned this miracle, in a work which professes all along to record the ordinary, not the extraordinary operations of the Holy Ghost, were not the woman distinguished by "her good works" and alms-deeds which she did." All the widows

* Mark v. 13.

† Gal. ii. 8.

‡ Acts ix.

stood by Peter weeping, and shewing the “coats and garments which she had made, while she was with them.” Thus had this woman’s faith evidenced itself by good works, and the spirit of piety and of prayer had gone hand in hand with that of industrious beneficence. Hail, Tabitha ! thou hast the highest glory, and of the most solid kind, which is attainable on earth. But the reader sees how simple and low christian exploits must appear in the eyes of worldly men. They are not like the swelling deeds of heroes and statesmen, which have hitherto, for the most part, monopolized the historic page. But the persons who are influenced by the Spirit of Christ, with Tabitha, will yet know with whom they would wish to be numbered. The female sex, almost excluded from civil history, will appear perhaps more conspicuous in ecclesiastical. Less immersed in secular concerns, and less haughty and independent in spirit, they seem, in all ages, to have had their full proportion, or more than the other sex, of the grace of the gospel.

SECTION III.

Samaria.

THIS country lay in the midst between Judea and Galilee, though distinguished from them both in its polity and religion. The inhabitants possessed a large part of the district which had belonged to the ten tribes, whom the kings of Assyria had carried into captivity. These conquerors had filled their vacant place with various colonists,* who mixed the worship of Jehovah with their idols, vainly boasted of their relation to Jacob,† professed to regard the law of Moses, and despised, or at least depreciated, the rest of the Old Testament. Our Saviour clearly decides the contest which for ages had been carried on between them and the

* 2 Kings xvii.

† John v. 12.

Jews, in favour of the latter.* But though the Samaritan was an idolater in his very foundation, yet in moral practice he appears not worse than the Jew. Both, indeed, were at this time extremely corrupted, and gloried in cherishing an enmity, which forbade them the exercise of common humanity to one another.

The divine Saviour pitied this people. He visited them himself,† and some sinners were converted. He made a second attempt,‡ but the bigotry of the village to which he approached, prevented them from receiving him there, a circumstance which excited the fiery zeal of the two sons of Zebedee, and gave occasion to our Lord to say, “The Son of Man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” He meekly bore the repulse, and went to another village. But the effusions of his kindness toward this unhappy people were now to appear in abundance.

The next person to Stephen among the seven deacons in zeal and activity, was Philip. Driven from Jerusalem by the persecution, he was directed to go to Samaria, perhaps the same as Sichar, where our Lord had conversed with the woman over Jacob’s well. There he preached Christ, and the gospel entered the hearts of many, so “that there was great joy in that city.”§ The inhabitants appear to have been a very ignorant, simple people, but now that the Spirit of God was poured upon them, none received the gospel with more cordial pleasure. One effect immediately appeared, which indeed never fails to attend the hearty reception of the gospel. Superstition and diabolical delusions vanished. One Simon had deceived this people with sorceries, I dare not say with pretended sorceries: we shall see sufficient proof, before we have done with the apostolical history, that sorcery was a real thing. For a long time they had been infatuated, but Philip’s doctrine expelled their regard for these things, and numbers of both sexes were baptized. Simon himself, though a stranger to the nature and power of Christ’s religion, was yet convinced, that christianity in general

* John iv. 22.

† John iv.

‡ Luke ix. 52.

§ Acts viii. 8.

was true ; and this seems the just idea of a mere historical believer.

The apostles hearing of the happy reception which the gospel met with at Samaria, sent down Peter and John, who prayed on their behalf, that the Holy Ghost might be imparted through the imposition of hands. The Spirit was communicated, not only in extraordinary gifts, but also in an effusion of the same holy graces, which had appeared in Judea. The former were those alone, which attracted the attention of Simon. His avaricious heart immediately conceiving the prospect of vast wealth to be acquired, were he once possessed of the power, he offered them a sum of money for the communication of the secret. Peter, who saw at once his covetousness, and his ignorance, rebuked him in the severest manner, assured him that his heart was wrong altogether, and his state accursed, notwithstanding his baptism and profession of christianity. At the same time he exhorted him to repent and to seek the divine forgiveness. Here we see how singularly remote the religion of Jesus is from all worldly plans and schemes, and what an awful difference there ever is between a real and nominal christian. The conscience of Simon felt the reproof ; he begged the apostle's prayers' but it does not appear that he prayed for himself. Peter and John preached through many Samaritan villages, and then returned to Jerusalem.

The Samaritans, a sort of half Jews, (for they were all circumcised) being favoured with the same spiritual blessings as the rest, the minds of christians were prepared to expect the extension of the same grace to uncircumcised idolaters. And among the wonders of divine love which we have reviewed, this is a pleasing circumstance, that Jews and Samaritans, who for ages had disagreed in rites, were now united in Jesus, and while each felt the same obligations to grace, learnt mutual charity for the first time.

SECTION IV.

*Ethiopia.**

IT is instructive to observe, by what gentle degrees the goodness of God was preparing the way for the general diffusion of his grace in the world. The first christians, even the apostles themselves, were by no means disposed to think with any particular compassion of Gentiles, and would scarce have thought of spreading the gospel beyond the bounds of their own nation, had not the persecution driven many out of Jerusalem. The teachers themselves needed to be taught of God this part of their office. So helpless is man in divine things, even after he has been favoured with grace, that by fresh communications alone, he can be induced to make any additional improvement. After Philip had finished his work at Samaria, he was, by an extraordinary commission, ordered to travel southward toward the desert. He soon discovered the reason; he fell in with an Ethiopian eunuch, a minister of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had been worshipping at Jerusalem, and was returning home in his chariot. Men, who feel the worth of their souls, will not be unemployed when alone. Their concern for their best interests will operate most powerfully, when they are most disengaged from business. The man was reading the prophet Esaias, and the adorable Providence of God had directed him at that particular time to the fifty-third chapter, which gives so clear a description of Christ crucified. Philip asked him, if he understood what he was reading. The man confessing his ignorance, desired Philip to come and sit with him. The evangelist took the opportunity of expounding to him the gospel through the medium of the passage he was then reading, which at once lays open the guilty and miserable state of man, his recov-

* The Ethiopia to which this section is confined, seems to be that part of the country, whose metropolis is called Meroe, situated in a large island, encompassed by the Nile and the rivers of Astapus and Astoborra: For in these parts (as the elder Pliny informs us) queens had a long time governed under the title of CANDACE. See *Cave's Life of Philip*.

ery only by the grace of Jesus Christ, the nature, end, and efficacy of his death and resurrection, and justification before God by the knowledge of him. The Ethiopian's mind had been prepared for the doctrine; he had been at the pains to attend Jewish instructions, the best then to be had in the world, except the christian, which he now heard, for the first time; nor had the scandalous wickedness of the Jewish nation hindered him from attending that worship, which he believed to be of divine origin. The ignorance of his own country suited not the meanest light of a serious mind. His case is an encouragement for men, however ignorant and mistaken at present, to seek earnestly to God, as he will take care that they shall find. The man felt himself guilty and wicked, and the views of the prophetic chapter before us, laid open, by the preacher, discovered to him the remedy, which it pleased God so powerfully to apply to his heart, that as soon as he came to a certain water, he desired to be baptized. Philip assured him, that there was no impediment, if he was sincere in the faith of Christ. On which he professed, that he believed that the Jesus of Nazareth, whom Philip had preached to him, was indeed the Son of God prophesied of in Isaiah, and answered the character of Saviour there given him. Philip then baptized him. Though his instructor was by the Spirit of the Lord immediately taken from him, he went on his way into his own country rejoicing.* Doubtless this joy had a solid and powerful cause; and if this case be compared with that of the three thousand first converts, and both with the doctrine of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, conversion will appear to be a spiritual, internal work, humbling men for sin, and comforting them with forgiveness by Christ. The nominal profession, with which such numbers content themselves, may seem to fit them for little else, than to disgrace christianity by their practice.

It is impossible that the Ethiopian, thus powerfully enlightened and rejoicing in God, could be silent, when

* Acts viii.

he returned home. His influence and character would at least secure him a respectful attention from some of his countrymen; and thus the gospel most probably was first planted in Ethiopia. But we have no more scripture light on the subject.

SECTION V.

Cæsarea.

THE great mixture of Jews and Gentiles in some of the extreme parts of the holy land or its neighbourhood, afforded a providential opportunity for the gradual illumination of the latter, the abatement of Jewish bigotry, the demonstration of divine grace in the salvation of all sorts of men, and the union of christian hearts. Thus we find that a church was planted at Tyre, another at Ptolemais,* places which must have abounded with Gentiles. But Cæsarea affords the most remarkable instance of the observation just now made. It was the residence of the Roman governor, and was so situated in the confines of Syria and Judea, that it was a matter of doubt to which region it ought to be assigned; and the final determination of this question in favour of the Syrians is mentioned by Josephus, as one of the immediate causes of the war, which ended with the destruction of Jerusalem. This circumstance shews the great importance of the city, and the strong interest which both parties had in it.

Philip, after a laborious passage from Azotus, in preaching through all the cities, settled at length in Cæsarea. Here he was stationary for many years.† We find him toward the conclusion of the period of about thirty years, which takes in the history of the Acts, still fixed in the same place, with four virgin daughters, where he entertained St. Paul in his last journey to Jerusalem. I can no more conceive Philip to have been

* Acts xxi.

† Acts viii. 40, all compared with xxi. 8.

idle and unfruitful all this time, than James to have been so at Jerusalem. A church mixed of Jews and Gentiles would naturally be formed under so zealous a pastor, whose observation of the grace of God in the case of the eunuch, must have opened his mind to an affectionate reception of Gentile converts.

Indeed the abuse, which the malignant pride of the Jews had made of the Mosaic prohibition of intercourse with Gentiles, was a great bar to the extension of the gospel. They refused to keep company with foreigners, and seem to have looked on them as devoted to destruction. The apostles themselves were as yet under the power of the same bigotry, till a vision from heaven instructed Peter, as he was praying on the house-top at Joppa, that he ought not to call any man common or unclean.* By this he was prepared for the work which the Lord was immediately assigning him. The Holy Spirit suggested to him that three men were at that time enquiring for him, and directed him to go with them; "for I have sent them."† Peter was soon informed by the men that they had been sent to him from Cæsarea ‡ by Cornelius a Roman centurion there, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his family, gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway; who had been warned from God by an holy angel to send for him. Peter lodged the three men that night; two of them were household servants, and the third (rare character!) a devout soldier, who waited on him continually.

Next day Peter went with them, but had the pre-

* Acts x.

† The proper personality and divinity of the Holy Ghost, and the unlimited subjection due to him from christian pastors, and of course from all christians, are solidly deducible from this and various similar passages in the Acts of the Apostles.

‡ Much has been written concerning two sorts of proselytes to the Jewish religion, circumcised ones, and incomplete ones, called Proselytes of the Gate. Two learned critics, Dr. Lardner and Dr. Doddridge, seem to have shewn however, that the latter had no existence. Cornelius was a Gentile altogether, and treated as such by the Jews, though from his pious attention to the Jewish religion he must have been at least a proselyte of the second sort if any ever was so. In that case it seems difficult to conceive, why any Jew should have made such a difficulty of conversing with persons of this description.

caution to take with him six Jewish christians from Joppa as witnesses of his proceedings. The next day they entered Cæsarea, and came into the house of Cornelius, who had called together his kinsmen and near friends, with that charity for their souls, which fails not to affect the minds of those who have real charity for their own. On the entrance of Peter he falls down and worships. Peter corrects his mistaken devotion. Cornelius informs him, that having been particularly engaged in fasting and prayer, he was assured by an angel that his prayers and alms were acceptable to God, and had obeyed the divine direction in sending for him. Peter now preached the gospel to the company, frankly owning, that he was at length fully convinced, that God was no respecter of persons, but equally regarded Jew and Gentile, whoever he was that feared him and wrought righteousness. On this broad basis of encouragement, he was enabled to preach to them the good news of forgiveness of sins by Jesus Christ, whose history they knew, though they did not understand the nature of his doctrine. He directed them now to receive it cordially for their peace with God. The perfect holiness and divine works of Jesus, he observed, demonstrated him to be no impostor, but sent of God unquestionably ; that he and the other apostles were witnesses of his resurrection, and had received a commission from him to preach to the people, and to urge men's acceptance of him here, if ever they expected to be welcomed by him when he should judge the quick and dead at his second coming ; that all the prophets had testified, that whoever placed his confidence for salvation in his name, should receive remission of sins.

Few words suffice, where God himself is powerfully at work. The whole company were converted to God. The Holy Ghost, both in an extraordinary and in an ordinary way, sealed the apostle's sermon. The Jewish brethren were astonished to find Gentiles put on an equal footing with Jews. Peter, after observing how unreasonable it would be to deny baptism to persons who had received the Holy Ghost, no less than themselves, baptized the whole company, and at their desire

spent a few days with them, to instruct them farther in christian principles, and then left them to the care of Philip, whose character at Cæsarea would probably rise from this time.

A remark or two on this important transaction will be proper.

1. The grace of God acts very variously in converting sinners. There are great shades of difference in the cases of Saul, of the eunuch, and of Cornelius. The preaching of the gospel found the first a determined enemy, the second an ignorant enquirer, the third a regenerate person already, though with no more than Old Testament light. But to all, the doctrine itself is the same; and the work of God in humbling man for his sins, and leading him to Christ alone for justification, is the same.

2. How necessary is it, that the way of peace by Christ alone be distinctly explained and understood! Cornelius, with his enlightened mind and tender conscience, unless he had understood the doctrine of forgiveness by the blood of the Redeemer, had never found peace. Imperfection still attending his best actions, he must have remained miserable in his spirit. The doctrine of forgiveness, accompanied by the Holy Spirit, brought him at once to a peace of conscience before unknown. How careful should we be to understand it aright! how zealous to transmit, as we can, the precious jewel to posterity!

3. How narrow are the hearts of men! how circumscribed the charity even of the best! With difficulty even christian Jews are brought to admit as brethren the Gentile converts. Self-righteousness is natural to mankind. That God should receive as his children idolatrous Gentiles, as well as religious Jews, provokes the pride of the heart.

SECTION IV.

Antioch and some Other Asiatic Churches.

WE have not yet seen all the good effects which Providence brought out of Stephen's persecution. Though the apostles thought it their duty to continue to water the flocks of Judea and Galilee, and to look on Jerusalem as a sort of central metropolis to them all, they encouraged the inferior pastors, who fled from the rage of persecution, to disseminate the gospel in Gentile regions. Damascus, we have seen, reaped the benefit of this dispensation, and so did Tarsus. Some travelled as far as Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch, still preaching only to Jews. At length some Cypriot and Cyrenian Jews ventured to break through the pale of distinction, and at Antioch, the metropolis of Syria, preached the Lord Jesus to the Gentiles. The Greek language here prevailed, and on this account the inhabitants were called Grecians,* being the descendants of a Macedonian colony, planted there by the successor of Alexander. And now the Lord, willing to overcome effectually the reluctances of self-righteous bigotry, attended their ministry with remarkable success. The idolators felt the renovating power of the gospel, and in great numbers turned to the Lord. The mother church hearing of this, sent Barnabas whose piety and charity were renowned, to carry on and propagate a work, which required more labourers. His benevolent heart was feasted with the prospect, and the reality of salvation by the grace of Christ thus exemplified on persons, whose lives had hitherto been involved in paganism, was evidenced in a manner hitherto unknown. Finding many converts, he exhorted them to perseverance, and the addition of believers was still so large, that he began to look out for a co-adjutor. He sought for Saul, who was then labouring at Tarsus, perhaps with

* Acts xi. 20.

no great success; we are told of none at least, "for a prophet is not honoured in his own country;" and brought him to Antioch. This populous city employed them a whole year. Here christian societies were regularly formed, consisting, in a great measure, of Gentiles. And here the followers of Christ were first called christians. It is not probable, that they would give themselves that name. The terms *brethren*, *elect*, *faithful*, *saints*, were names which they would rather approve. The name of christian seems given by their adversaries. It is now a term of honour, then a more opprobrious one could scarce be thought of by the learned and the polite. Were a man allowed to possess many good qualities, "but he is a christian," would have been deemed more than a counterbalance to them all. And other terms invented by the malevolence of unregenerate men, in different ages, to stigmatize the same sort of persons, have produced by the bare sound, the same effect on prejudiced minds.

The faith of the Antiochians was signally operative. Warmed with the love of Christ, and rejoicing in the prospect of heavenly treasures, they cheerfully contributed to the relief of the poor christians in Judea, distressed by a famine. A large extension of Christ's kingdom in any place, naturally calls together a large number of pastors. It is pleasant indeed to labour among the faithful, encircled with sincere friends. It is not every real saint who has the fortitude and charity to quit so agreeable a scene, for the sake of breaking up fresh ground. How much longer these teachers would have remained at Antioch, if left to themselves, we know not. But the Holy Ghost now selected Barnabas and Saul for other labours. They obeyed the call; and Seleucia in the neighbourhood was their first destination. At this port they found a convenient passage to the fertile and pleasurable island of Cyprus. Methinks the evil spirits, who there supported the religious rites, and the sensual practices of the devotees of Venus began to tremble for this capital scene of their dominions.

From Salamis, the eastern point of the island, to Paphos the western, they spread the glad tidings of the gospel.

In this last place they found Elymas, a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet, in company with Sergius Paulus, the Roman governor of the island, a man of sense and candour, who sent for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. The sorcerer endeavoured to prevent the good effects of their labours; till Paul, full of holy indignation at his diabolical malice, was enabled miraculously to strike him blind for a season. Sergius was astonished, we are told, "at the doctrine" of the Lord,* and commenced a christian from that hour.

The two apostles sailed now to the adjoining continent, and arrived at Perga in Pamphylia. And here John Mark, who had thus far attended them as minister, left them and returned to Jerusalem. It was, it may seem, more agreeable to him to profess and practise christianity at home with his mother and friends, than to expose himself to heathens. Even then traces of the love of the world were to be seen among christians.

Pisidia, lying to the north of Pamphylia, was the next scene. Here was another Antioch, and the apostles on the Sabbath-day attended the Jewish synagogue. After the usual reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers gave them a friendly invitation to exhort the people, which Paul embraced with his usual zeal. His sermon is much of the same strain with those of Peter and of Stephen, tending to beget in the hearers a conviction of sinfulness, and to give testimony to Jesus, concluding with a remarkable plain declaration of the grand doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus only, and a solemn warning against the dreadful consequences of hardness of heart, and of contempt of the Divine message. The Gentiles, powerfully impressed with the news, desired to hear more of the subject the next Sabbath. Many Jews and proselytes were converted; and the whole city almost came next Sabbath to hear. The sight was too much for the envy of the infidel Jews, who opposed Paul with all their might. The two apostles

* Acts xiii. 12. The expression is remarkable, but has a peculiar propriety. A mere historical believer would have been astonished at the miracle merely. Sergius, a true convert, who entered into the holy nature of the gospel by a spiritual perception, is astonished "at the doctrine."

boldly assured them, that though it was their duty to carry the news of salvation to them first, yet as they despised God's gift of eternal life, they would turn now to the Gentiles, agreeably to the glorious prophecy of Isaiah,* where the experimental influence of the gospel on Gentile hearts is clearly described. The Pagans, not so proud as the Jews, felt that they had no righteousness to plead before God, thankfully embraced the gospel, and believed in great numbers.

Pisidia was now full of the gospel; and the apostles proceeded with vast success, till a persecution, stirred up by the Jews, induced some self-righteous religious ladies, in conjunction with the magistrates, to drive them out of their coasts. From thence they came to Iconium, the northern extremity of the country; and the disciples whom they left, though harrassed with persecution, were yet "filled with joy and the Holy Ghost." The internal consolation of their religion supported their souls. In Iconium the two apostles continued a long time, and delivered the message of divine reconciliation with great freedom and energy, to the conversion of a great multitude both of Jews and Gentiles. The unbelieving Jews† exerted their usual malevolence, and filled the Gentiles with the strongest prejudices against the christians. In truth, their conduct, though by no means uncommon, affords a dreadful instance of human depravity. It cannot be denied, that those Jews must in religious knowledge have far exceeded the idolatrous inhabitants of Iconium. They held the Unity of the Godhead, they worshipped him in their synagogue, they heard his precepts from Sabbath to Sabbath out of the law of Moses and the prophets. They must have known thus far, that the Messiah was foretold in the latter, and they could not but be acquainted with their duty both to God and man in many respects by means of the former. Yet so unreasonable are they, as to labour to prevent their pagan neighbours from being instructed in any thing that deserved the name of religion, and to persecute with unceasing acrimony two of their own

* 49th chap.

† Acts xiv.

countrymen, who agreed with them in the profession of the worship of the one living and true God. Of so little influence is what some call the "Unitarian" religion, if it be *unconnected* with the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. Persons, who make it the whole of their religion, can, it seems, rather see mankind remain buried in the depths of the most senseless idolatry in worship, and of vicious profligacy in life, than brought over to the real christian religion, the hearty renunciation of their own righteousness, and an humble dependance on the atoning blood of Jesus ! The preaching of Paul and Barnabas excited a variety of speculations in this city. The Gentiles were divided, and part ranged themselves with the Jews, and part with the apostles. But the former had the advantage for the present, because they had the arms, (which christian soldiers cannot use) of violence and persecution.

The apostles, aware of their designs, fled into Lycaonia, a country to the east of Pisidia, and there preached the gospel, particularly in Lystra and Derbe. In the former of these places, a poor cripple, who never had the use of his feet, heard Paul with the most respectful attention, and was so far wrought upon already in his mind, as to believe, that there was virtue in the name of Jesus Christ to heal him. To confirm him in his yet infant views of the christian religion, to attest the truth, and to convince men that Jesus was both mighty and benevolent, Paul was enabled by a word to restore the man to the full use of his limbs. Immediately these poor idolaters concluded, that the gods were come down to them in the likeness of men. Through this whole country of Asia Minor, the Greek literature, and with it the numerous fables of Hellenistic vanity, abounded. They had heard of Jupiter and Mercury particularly as visiting mankind, and now Barnabas, as the elder perhaps, and more majestic figure of the two, must be Jupiter, and Paul, as the more eloquent speaker, must be Mercury, the classical god of eloquence. The priest of Jupiter brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. It was a grievous circumstance ; but I know not how

to regret it. For one of the finest opportunities was given to the apostles to demonstrate the spirit of real godliness. However pleasing it might be to corrupt nature to receive the idolatrous* homage of a deluded people, nothing could be more abhorrent from the nature of the gospel itself, and from the humble character of its teachers. They could not bear the sight; they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, and expostulated with them on the absurdity of their conduct; assuring them that they were no more than frail men like themselves, and that their intention in preaching to them was, to turn them from those vanities to the living God who formerly indeed had left all nations to follow their own ways, but now had sent them to preach a method of salvation from these idolatries. Not that the worship of false gods was excusable; the constant benefits of Providence calling for thankfulness, and pointing out the Supreme Creator to the consciences of men. Thus faithfully did they preach conviction of sin to the Lycaonians, and with difficulty prevented the actual performance of the sacrifice, which would have given them more pain than the persecution that followed.

The fickle multitude were soon persuaded by some Jews, who came from Antioch and Iconium, to harbour the worst opinion of Paul and Barnabas, and their dislike of secular glory would contribute not a little to alienate minds once idolatrously attached to them. In a tumult Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city, as a dead corpse; and while the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city, miraculously restored, it may seem, and departed the next day with Barnabas to Derbe. There many were converted, and the persecuting spirit intermitting, they visited again in circuit the regions of Pisidia, and Lycaonia, encouraging the disciples to persevere in the faith

* The historical reader can scarce fail to contrast with this behaviour of the apostles the ambitious arts of Jesuit missionaries, and to regret the want of a similar piety and integrity in a late celebrated naval commander in a scene of trial of the same kind, which happened a little before his lamented catastrophe.

of Jesus in confidence of divine support, and in full expectation of the kingdom of heaven, into which real christians must not expect to enter without much tribulation.

They now ordained some of the brethren to minister in every church, and solemnly recommended both pastors and flocks to the care of that gracious Lord on whom they believed, and solemn fasting and prayer were used on this occasion. Returning through Pamphylia, they preached again at Perga, and from Attalia sailed to the great Antioch, whence they had been by the prayers of the church recommended to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled.

Here they remained a considerable time previous to their attendance at the council of Jerusalem, after which they returned to the same church in company with Judas and Silas, who with authority from the mother church, confirmed them in the liberty of the gospel, in conjunction with many other teachers. The christians of Antioch walked now in genuine consolation, and while they dared to rest on Christ alone, they practised good works in a filial spirit. Thankful for the assistance of Judas and Silas, they dismissed them to the apostles who had sent them.* Silas however loved his situation, and remained in the service of the Gentiles.

Some days after Paul proposed to Barnabas a second circuitous visit of the Asiatic churches. Barnabas, fond of Mark, his nephew, proposed to take him with them. Paul, remembering his former desertion, thought him unfit for the work. On which side there was more blame in this contest may be hard to determine. Probably both were too positive; but to us at this distance Paul's view of the question seems the more just. The consequence was a separation between these two christian leaders, and it does not appear that they ever saw one another after, though it should not be doubted, but that their esteem and regard for one another, on the whole, continued. The best men are but men; the progress of the gospel was not however retarded. Bar-

* Acts xv. 33.

nabas sailed with Mark to Cyprus, and here he is dismissed from the sacred memoirs. Paul took with him Silas, having the recommendation of the brethren to the grace of God, which would lead one to conclude, that the Antiochians preferred his cause to that of Barnabas. He now went through Syria and Silicia, confirming the churches.

In Lycaonia he found the pious Timothy, whom he took as an associate, and confirmed the Gentile converts every where in christian liberty : thus the churches were established in the faith, and increased in number daily.



SECTION VI.

Galatia.

THE love of God, where it rules in an ardent degree, is insatiable. The apostle's heart is not content with the trophies already erected in many parts of Asia Minor. As the miser thinks no acquisitions great, while any prospects of farther gain still open to his view, so Paul could not with complacency rest in the attainments already made, while so much ground still lay before him to the north and to the west in the hands of Satan. He travelled throughout Phrygia and Galatia.* The plantation of the churches in the former country will afterwards engage our attention ; the latter, whose history in point of time is much sooner concluded in sacred story, will be now most conveniently exhibited. The epistle written to that church affords us almost the only materials we have ; but little as they are, they are inestimable. I am entirely convinced by Dr. Lardner,† that this was an early epistle, and by no means dated from Rome, as the postscript intimates. Nor is this the only place in which those postscripts, which the common reader should know make no part of the apostolical writings, deceive us.

* Acts xvi. 6.

† See his Supplement.

The people of this country received the gospel in great numbers, insomuch that several churches were planted through the district. They understood St. Paul's doctrine, and received it in its true sense,* that justification before God is attainable only by faith in Christ crucified. He clearly laid before them the riches of divine grace. And they had so strong an impression of its truth, and felt so much of its energy, that they seemed as it were to see the Son of God crucified among them,† received the promised spirit of adoption, by which they rejoiced in God as their Father,‡ and cheerfully suffered much persecution for the name of Christ.§ Before this, they had lived in the darkest idolatry; for these churches were formed almost, if not entirely of Gentiles.|| The true God was made known to them, and Unitarianism, of itself unable to emancipate men from sin, as the case of the Jews evinced, was with them attended with the distinct knowledge and lively faith of Jesus.

What proves the divine taste of this people was, that no disadvantage in the circumstances of the delivery of the gospel operated with them to its prejudice. Some remarkable infirmity this great man was afflicted with (what it was precisely we are no where told) but it held out something contemptible in the eyes of profane persons. And it is no small proof of their being much humbled and awakened in their minds by the Spirit of God, that this circumstance lessened not at all their regard to the apostle or to his message. "They received him as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus."¶ They confessed the blessedness, which they felt on account of the gospel, and were ready to give even the most painful proofs of their affection to him. In all this we see, what the gospel is, what it does for men, who truly understand and embrace it in an humbled heart, what was St. Paul's manner of preaching, and how different a thing christianity then appeared from the frigid speculations which in modern times bear that name.

* Chap. i. 9.

† Acts iii. 1.

‡ iv. 6.

§ iii. 4.

|| iv. 8.

¶ iv. 14.

But soon after Paul had left them with the most pleasing hopes of their spiritual growth, he was astonished to hear of a change for the worse, which took place among them. Either some Jews of their country, or some others who lately arrived at Galatia, from other parts of Asia Minor, where Paul had laboured, took pains to pervert them. They made no attempts to unsettle their minds in the views of the Unity of the Godhead, and the principal facts of christianity, nor attempted to draw them back to the worship of idols. Nor did they formally deny the atonement of Christ, nor endeavour to draw them from christian worship. Yet was it another gospel, though it deserved not the name of gospel,* to the love of which they seduced them. They assured them, that they could not be saved without circumcision, and prevailed on them to Judaize so far, as to observe the rites of Moses in various instances.† They took pains to estrange them from Paul, and to draw them over to themselves, and to a worldly spirit of conformity, loving to appear fair in the eyes of men, and seeming to be zealous for good works, not to practise them, but to avoid the persecution which attended the cross of Christ.‡ To give the better effect to their insinuations, they instilled into them disrespectful ideas of Paul as far inferior to the other apostles, and, as it seems, represented the mother church of Jerusalem, with the college of apostles there, as coinciding with themselves in doctrine.

Thus the self-righteous poison, which first issued from Jerusalem, was brought into this distant province, where the ignorance and simplicity of the people unacquainted with Jewish modes and habits, gave it the freest room to operate. These false teachers still called themselves christians, and the mischief which they introduced, seems at first sight no great one. So, I doubt not, some fashionable perversions of evangelical truth at this day, of a similar kind, appear to many to be of no great consequence. It is no fault of mine, that this Galatian delusion appears strongly to resemble

* Chap. i. 6, 7.

† iv 10.

‡ vi 12

them. I have represented things as they appear to me from the Epistle. The great evil lurking under all this, was the adulteration of the faith of Jesus, and of dependance on him alone for all salvation. In no Epistle does the apostle speak so sharply or express himself so vehemently. It appears to have come warm from a charitable heart, just after the reception of the disagreeable tidings. He professes himself astonished at their defection from Christ; and execrates any man or even angel, who should preach any other way of salvation. If such a person still call himself a christian, and hold the historical facts of the gospel, the case is not altered for the better; the deception only passing more current on that account.* He asserts, that if they mixed circumcision, or any work of the law, with Christ in the article of justification, Christ would be of no effect to them.† He must be their whole Saviour, or he would be nothing; law and grace in this case being quite opposite. He marks the mere worldly nature of the doctrine they were embracing,‡ it would make them mere Jews indeed, proud, self-righteous, void of the love of God and man,§ and no better in their spiritual state than they were while idolaters.|| Thus they would lose all the liberty of the gospel, and be mere slaves in religion, like all unconverted persons, whose bottom is merely self-righteous. He points out to them the peculiar nature of the gospel, as perfectly distinct from any thing that mere man is apt to teach or ready to embrace. In the historical part of the Epistle he vindicates his own apostolical character; inculcates throughout in all possible variety of language, and with his usual copiousness, both of clear argument and strong diction, the all-important article of justification, and presses the necessity of continuing in it, in order to be benefited by it. Otherwise we make Christ the minister of sin, or of condemnation, build again what we have destroyed, and, as far as in us lies, make him to have died in vain. He appeals to their own experience of the happy fruits of the gospel, which they had felt

* Chap. i. † Chap. v. ‡ Chap. vi. toward the end. § Chap. v. || iv. 9

within, and represents himself as travailing in birth for them, till Christ be formed in them. He expresses himself dubious of their state, and desirous of visiting them, that he might adapt his language to their perilous situation. He wishes that their evil advisers were cut off, so mischievous were they to souls, and assures them, that the divine vengeance would overtake them. He informs them, that the persecution, which he himself endured, was on account of this very doctrine. This it was that stirred up the enmity of the human heart; and this doctrine being lost, the gospel becomes a mere name, and christianity is lost in the group of common religions.

It will be proper for us to bear in mind the apostle's reasonings on this subject, and to apply them to every period of church history; since it is evident, that the rise or fall of this great christian article, must determine the vigour or decline of real religion in all ages. He neglects not however in his usual manner to inculcate the necessity of good works, as the just fruits and evidences of a real christian state,* and particularly encourages them to works of mercy, attended with a patient and cheerful prospect into eternity, and animated with genuine charity.†

There is reason to hope, that the best effects attended the Epistle. No very long time after, the apostle again visited these churches, and went over the whole country, strengthening "all the disciples."‡ This is all that I can collect of the history of this church from scripture, except a single hint in another Epistle,§ in which he recommends to the Corinthians to use the same plan for the relief of the poor saints, which he had suggested to the Galatians. From the influence which he hence appears to have had in Galatia, it is probable, that the Judaical perversion was overcome.

* Chap. v. toward the end. † Chap. vi. ‡ Acts xviii. 23. § 1 Cor. xvi. 1.

SECTION VIII.

Philippi.

THE dispensation of the gospel is doubtless the greatest blessing that can be vouchsafed to any country. But the times and the seasons God hath reserved to himself. Even in this sense salvation is of grace; and divine providence alone orders and appoints, that the gospel shall be preached here or there, as he pleases. Paul and Silas, if left to themselves, in their progress to the west, would have evangelized Pergamus or Asia propria and Bithynia,* but were prevented by special intimations of the Holy Spirit. They came now to Troas, so called from its being the place, or near the place, where old Troy had stood, by the sea-coast, uncertain whither they should go next, and perhaps little apprehensive, that God now, for the first time, was introducing his gospel into Europe. A nightly vision in which a Macedonian intreated Paul to come over into his country and help them, determined at once their destination. They sailed from Troas to the island of Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis, a Macedonian sea-port, whence through the gulf of Strymon they came to Philippi, the first city of that part of Macedonia, which they would meet with in their way from Neapolis. So I understand St. Luke's expression *ἡ πόλις*; for Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia. The city itself, though originally Macedonian, and so named from Philip the father of Alexander, was then a Roman colony, inhabited by Roman citizens, and regulated by Roman laws and customs. The region itself had been renowned for constituting the third of the four great monarchies under the arms of Alexander, and the place itself had been something more than half a century ago the scene of a famous battle between two Roman parties engaged in a civil war. Neither of those seasons

* Acts xvi. 7.

would have been at all convenient for the gospel. The present was a scene of tranquillity and order under the Roman government ; and Macedonia, though now only a Roman province, was going to be the subject of transactions infinitely more noble than those which adorn the history of its greatest princes.

The first appearances did not promise any thing remarkable. They spent a few days at first with little prospect of success. They found a few Jews here, who used on the Sabbath-day to frequent an oratory out of the city by the river-side, and some women, religiously disposed, resorted thither. It was the constant method of the apostles to join themselves to Unitarians, wherever they could find them, as the first opening for the gospel of Christ. They did so here and spake to the women. One of them was Lydia, a person of some property. Her heart the Lord opened, that " she attended to the things which were spoken by Paul." She was baptized with her family, and with affectionate importunity prevailed on the apostle and his companions to make her house their home in Philippi. Here we have the beginnings of the Philippian church ; but the conversion was sound and stable, and her progress in the divine life seems of the same kind as that of Cornelius. Vexed at the prospect, Satan employed a girl possessed with a spirit of Python to bring the gospel into contempt, if possible. She constantly followed the christian preachers, and bore them the most honourable testimony. Paul was grieved, as being fully sensible of the ill effect, which a supposed union between Christ and Python* must occasion in the minds of men. He was at length enabled miraculously to eject the demon. The proprietors of the girl who had made a traffic of her oracular powers, finding that she was dispossessed of the demon, wreaked their vengeance on Paul and Silas, and by slanderous accusations induced the magistrates to scourge them severely, and to commit

* The very term leads me to apprehend, that the oracular work of the Pythian Apollo among the Pagans had something diabolical in it ; and the story before us demonstrates the reality of such delusions, and that human fraud and sagacity alone are not sufficient to account for them.

them to prison. The jailer thrust them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks.

In this situation, distressing indeed, and, in the eyes of many, ridiculous, these two servants of God at midnight, though oppressed with pain, and hunger, and every disagreeable circumstance, were yet enabled to pray and sing praises to God. So powerful are the consolations of the Holy Ghost, and so much did the love of Christ constrain them ! And now the Lord caused a great earthquake, which opened all the doors of the prison, and loosed every one's bonds. The jailer awakening, in his first trepidation, by a practice which I wish had been creditable among Pagans only, was going to rush into eternity. Paul kindly assured him, that none of the prisoners had escaped. And now being struck with horror at the thought of the world to come, to which he had been hastening in all his guilt, and being divinely convinced of his danger, he came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and asked what he must do to be saved. The answer was plain and direct. Why do any who call themselves christian ministers ever give any other ? "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and "thou shalt be saved and thy house." They then instructed him and his household in the nature of the gospel, and opened to him the doctrine of forgiveness by the blood of Christ. His conversion appears evidently of the same kind, as that of the three thousand at Jerusalem. He was humbled for his sins, and he received pardon by faith in Jesus. His ready submission to baptism, his affectionate treatment of those who had just before been the objects of his severity, and his joy in the Lord, demonstrated, that he was turned from Satan to God. His whole family shared with him in the same blessings.

In the morning the magistrates sent an order for the dismissal of the prisoners. But Paul thought it not inconsistent with christian meekness, to demand from them an apology for their illegal behaviour to Roman citizens, for such it seems Silas was, as well as Paul. The magistrates, alarmed, came personally to make

concessions, which were easily accepted. Being dismissed from prison, they entered into Lydia's house, comforted the disciples, and left Philippi for the present.

Some years after, the apostle again visited this people and found them still in a flourishing state. He always took a peculiar pleasure in this church; and in his Epistle written from Rome, he thanks God for their sincere fellowship in the gospel from the beginning. He expresses his expectation of liberty, and of being enabled to see them again, and exhorts them to bear patiently the persecutions to which they were exposed, as an evidence of the divine favour.*

Liberality was a shining virtue of this church. They had sent once and again to his relief at Thessalonica.† And now they had sent Epaphroditus to Rome to minister to his wants. A dangerous illness had brought this disciple to the borders of the grave. Upon his recovery he was afflicted to think of the distress, which the news of his sickness must have brought on the minds of the Philippians. Paul was therefore the more anxious to send him back. The sensibility of that love, with which the Holy Ghost had influenced all concerned in this affair, is finely described in this part of the Epistle.‡ The apostle toward the close of it even exults in the pleasure which the charity of these disciples gave him, and assures them, that his God would “supply all their need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” He warns them however against the dangers of seduction. Judaizing teachers desired to pervert them. He reminds them therefore§ of his own simple dependence on the Lord Jesus, though he had fairer pretensions than most men to self-righteousness, and with tears in his eyes, declares, that even then many pretended christians walked like enemies of the Cross of Christ.

Such was the work of God at Philippi. A considerable number of persons, once worshippers of idols, devoted to the basest lusts, and sunk in the grossest ignorance, were brought to the knowledge and love of the

* Philip. i. 28, 29. † Chap. iv. 16. ‡ Chap. ii. toward the end.
§ Chap. iii

true God, and the hope of salvation by his Son Jesus. In this faith and hope they persevered amidst a world of persecutions, steadily brought forth the fruits of charity, and lived in the joyful expectation of a blessed resurrection.



SECTION IX.

Thessalonica.

OF Amphipolis and Apollonia, the next cities of Macedonia through which St. Paul passed, nothing particular is recorded. But at Thessalonica another European church was formed inferior in solid piety to none in the primitive times. It had been rebuilt by Philip of Macedon, and had its name from his conquest of Thessaly. Here Paul followed his usual custom of preaching first to the Jews in their synagogue, and spent the first three Sabbaths in pointing out the evidences of christianity. The custom of the Jews, in allowing any of their countrymen to exhort in their synagogues, gave the apostle an easy opportunity of preaching to this people, till their usual enmity and obstinacy began to exert itself. Some of the Jews were however converted,* and a great multitude of religious Gentiles, who used to attend the synagogue, and not a few females of quality. So difficult is it for even Satan himself, to erase all perception of the one true God from the minds of men, so powerful is the voice of natural conscience, and so totally unreasonable is the polytheism of the Pagans, that notwithstanding the extreme depravity of human nature, we find, wherever the Jews carried on the public worship of the God of Israel, it was common for some Gentiles to join in their worship. Within the bounds of the Holy Land there were a number of this sort. And I observe through the whole tenor of Josephus' history, that the Romans treated what they held sacred with respect; and whoever was distinguished

* Acts xvii.

by any religious thoughtfulness from others, found nothing to suit him in Gentile rites, but preferred the worship of the Jews. The devout Greeks converted at Thessalonica were of this class, and this is not the first instance we have seen of the Lord's preparing persons, by an attention to a more imperfect light, for the Sun of Righteousness. But he is not confined to one method. The major part of the Thessalonian converts were idolaters,* who now turned to the living and true God, in the faith and hope of Jesus, who "delivered them from "the wrath to come." Faith, hope, and charity evinced this people to be God's elect; the word came to their hearts in much power and assurance; and though it exposed them to much affliction, this did not prevent their joy of the Holy Ghost.

The restless Jews were not ashamed to join with the most profligate Pagans in persecuting the new converts, and decent hypocrites and open sinners were once more seen united in opposing the church of God. They assaulted the house of Jason, at whose house Paul and his companions were entertained. Precautions having been used to secrete them, Jason and some other christians were brought before the magistrates, and calumniated with the usual charge of sedition. The Roman governors however were content with exacting a security from Jason and his friends for the peace of the state. But the apostle knew too well the malice of the Jews to trust to their moderation for the present, and therefore was obliged abruptly to leave the infant church, which appears however, from the first Epistle, which not long after he sent to them, not to have been without pastors, whom he charges them to honour and obey.†

The growth of this people in godliness was soon renowned through the christian world. Their persecution appears to have been grievous, and hence the comfort of God their saviour, and the prospect of the invisible world, became more precious to them. The apostle made two attempts to return to them, but was as oft disappointed by the malice of Satan.‡ Fearing, lest

* 1 Thess. i. 9

† 1 Thess. v.

‡ 1 Thess. ii. 18.

the weight of their affliction might crush their religion in its infancy, he sent Timothy to them, to establish and comfort them. From* him on his return he learnt the strength of their faith and love, and their affectionate remembrance of the apostle, whose benevolent effusions of joy and gratitude on the occasion exceed all encomium. The influence of the Holy Spirit in enlightening, comforting, and invigorating this people, seemed in a good measure to supply the want of pastoral instruction, in which from their circumstances they were probably defective. Yet they felt the love of God in the strongest manner, and exercised it on all around.†

Fornication indeed was a sin so commonly practised among the Gentiles, without the least suspicion of its evil, that Paul thought proper to warn them against it expressly and distinctly.‡

In his second Epistle he congratulates them on their great proficiency in faith and love; and while he comforts them with the prospect of the second coming of Christ, he takes occasion to correct a mistake, into which they had fallen from what he had mentioned in his former Epistle, of imagining that the last day was at hand. Men who had suddenly passed from the grossest ignorance into the full blaze of gospel-day, might easily make such a mistake, especially since their affections were now so strongly captivated with heavenly objects, and they found so little in a world of persecution to cheer their minds. There appears only one fault in this people, which he thought necessary to rebuke. He intimated something§ of it in the former Epistle, in the latter was more express.|| It was the want of industry in their callings, with which he charged some of them; for this was not a general evil. How they might fall into it, is easy to conceive. Persons all alive for God and his Christ, and knowing little of the deceitfulness of the heart, and the crafts of Satan, might find it irksome to attend to the concerns of this life. It was a fault in-

* 1 Thess. iii. 9, 10. † Chap. iv. 9, 10. ‡ Chap. iv. 3—9.

§ 1 Thess. iv. 11, 12. || 2 Thess. iii. 11.

deed, and very dangerous, if persisted in ; but as it was soon corrected, in all probability, and in part occasioned by the strength of heavenly affections, one cannot be very severe in censuring them.

It may be worth while for those, who feel themselves much irritated against similar evils attendant on the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit in our days, to consider whether they do not exercise more candour towards the Thessalonians, and respect them as real christians, while they scorn those who walk in their steps as enthusiasts.

This church bears the strongest signatures of godliness, the effect of no common out-pouring of the Spirit ; adorning the gospel with faith, hope, and charity, yet shewing by their faults and ignorance the importance of much pastoral instruction, in which their circumstances suffered them not to abound, and which under God would have soon cured the former, and removed the latter, and exposed only to such blemishes, as are most apt to attend great attainments in the divine life made with vast rapidity.

It appears, that St. Paul visited this people a considerable time after, and gave them much exhortation ; but we have no particular farther account of them.*

SECTION X.

Berea and Athens.

PAUL was conducted to Berea, a city of Macedonia, from Thessalonica. Here also was a Jewish synagogue, and here the preaching of the Cross was candidly

* In the first Epistle he "charges them by the Lord," that it be "read to all the holy brethren." As this seems to have been his first Epistle, and indeed the newest part of the whole New Testament, the solemnity of the adjuration (*ορκίζω*) has a peculiar propriety, as Dr. Lardner observes. The Thessalonians were no doubt disposed to receive it as matter of apostolical inspiration, and the importance of bringing every christian to be well acquainted with the word of God is fairly inferred.

received by Jews for the first time. A very singular character is given of the Jews of this place, a liberality of mind, which disposed them to listen with attention, and to search the scriptures of the Old Testament with daily assiduity. The grace of God seems to have prepared these persons for the gospel, and Paul had the pleasure to find a number of the stamp of Cornelius, who were groping their way to happiness, and were ready to hail the light as soon as it should dawn upon them. Many Jews here believed, and not a few Gentiles also of both sexes; those of the female sex were persons of quality. The rage of the Thessalonian Jews soon however disturbed this pleasing scene, and stirred up a persecution, which obliged the christians to use some art in saving the apostle's life. His conductors at first took the road toward the sea, which might lead the persecutors to suppose he had quitted the continent. They then brought him safe to Athens,* once the first city of Greece in all views, and still renowned for taste and science, the school in which the greatest Romans studied philosophy. Here, while he waited for the arrival of Silas and Timothy, he beheld the monuments of the city with other eyes than those of a scholar and a gentleman. No place in the world could more have entertained a curious and philosophical spirit than this. Temples, altars, statues, historical memorials, living philosophers of various sects, books of those who were deceased, a confluence of polite and humanized persons of various countries, enjoying the luxury of learned leisure, these things must at once have obtruded themselves on his notice; and no man in any age, by strength of understanding, warmth of temper, and justness of taste, seems to have been more capable of entering into the spirit of these scenes than Saul of Tarsus. But divine grace had given his faculties a very different direction, and the christian in him predominated extremely above the philosopher and the critic. He saw here, that even the excess of learning brought men no nearer to God. No place on earth

* Acts xvii.

was more given to idolatry. He could not therefore find pleasure in the classical luxuries presented before him : he saw his Maker disgraced, and souls perishing in sin. Pity and indignation swallowed up all other emotions ; and ministers of Christ, by their own sensations in similar scenes, may try how far they are possessed of the mind of Paul, which in this case certainly was the mind of Christ. If affections be lively, some exertions will follow. He laid open the reasons of christianity to Jews in their synagogue, to Gentile worshippers who attended the synagogue, and daily to any persons whom he met with in the forum. There were two sects very opposite to one another among the Pagan philosophers, the epicureans and the stoics. The former placed the chief good in pleasure, the latter in virtue, correspondent to the two chief sects among the Jews, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, and indeed to the two sorts among mankind in all ages who yet are in a state of nature, men of a licentious and dissipated turn, and self-righteous persons, who substitute their own reason and virtue in the room of divine grace and influence. As these will in any age unite against the real friends of Jesus Christ, so it was here. The apostle appeared a mere babbler in their eyes. Jesus and the resurrection, which he preached, were ideas from which their minds were so abhorrent, that they took them for a new god and goddess.

It belonged to the court of Areopagus to take cognizance of things of this nature. This court had unjustly condemned the famous Socrates, as if he had depreciated the established religion, though he had given as strong proofs of his polytheistic attachments, as he had of philosophical pride. It ought not however to be denied, that in a lower sense he suffered for righteousness' sake. His honest rebukes of vice and improbity exposed him to death ; so unsafe is even the least approximation to goodness in a world like this. That St. Paul escaped condemnation here, seems owing to circumstances. The court under the tolerating maxims of its Roman superiors, seems now to have

had only the privilege of examining tenets as a synod, without the penal power of magistracy.*

It would carry me too far to dwell on the excellent apology of Paul delivered before this court. He reproved their idolatry in language and by arguments perfectly classical, and announced so much of the gospel, as was adapted to the very ignorant state of his audience. Whoever duly examines this little masterpiece of eloquence, may see that he labours to beget in them the spirit of conviction, and to prepare them for gospel mercy, just as Peter did in his first sermon at Jerusalem. The means used by the two apostles are as different, as the circumstances of a Jewish and Athenian audience were. The end aimed at by both was the same.

There is reason to apprehend, that God never suffers the plain and faithful denunciation of his gospel to be altogether fruitless. A few believed in reality and with steadfastness, among whom was Dionysius a member of the court, and a woman named Damaris. These Paul left to the care of that gracious God who had opened their eyes, and departed from a city as yet too haughty, too scornful, and too indifferent concerning things of infinite moment, to receive the gospel. A church could hardly be said to be formed here, though a few individuals were converted. The little success at Athens evinces that a spirit of literary trifling in religion, where all is theory, and the conscience is unconcerned, hardens the heart effectually. What a contrast between the effects of the same gospel dispensed to the illiterate Macedonians, and the philosophical Athenians. Yet there want not many who call themselves christians, who affect to bestow on men of the former sort the appellation of barbarians, of the latter enlightened persons.

* In this however I am not very positive : a greater degree of sceptical indifference might, in the progress of refinement, have prevailed at Athens in the days of St. Paul, and the court might itself be as little disposed to persecute, as the Roman powers.

SECTION XI.

Corinth.

THIS was at that time the metropolis of Greece. Its situation in an isthmus rendered it remarkably convenient for trade. It was the residence of the Roman governor of Achaia, the name then given to all Greece, and it was at once full of opulence, learning, luxury, and sensuality. Hither the apostle came from Athens, and laboured both among the Jews and the Gentiles. Here providence gave him the acquaintance of Aquila and his wife Priscilla, two Jewish christians lately expelled from Italy, with other Jews, by an edict of the emperor Claudius. With them he wrought as a tent-maker, being of the same occupation: for every Jew, whether rich or poor, was obliged to follow some trade. After the arrival of Silas and Timothy, the apostle with much vehemence preached to his countrymen; but opposition and abuse were the only returns he met with. The modern notions of charity will scarcely be reconciled to the zealous indignation which he shewed on this occasion. He shook his garment and told them, that he was clear of their destruction, he would leave them, and apply himself to the Gentiles in this city. With this denunciation he left the synagogue, and entered into the house of one Justus, a devout person, well-affected to the gospel. Crispus also, the ruler of the synagogue, with his whole family, received the truth. But we hear of no more Jewish converts here. However many Corinthians were converted. And a gracious vision of the Lord Jesus,* who told him that he had much people in this city, encouraged him to stay here a year and a half. The rage of the Jews would doubtless be raised to the highest pitch; but, as usual, the moderate spirit of the Roman government prevented its sanguinary exertions. Gallio the proconsul, brother

of the famous Seneca, was perfectly indifferent concerning the progress of christianity, and refused to pay the least attention to their complaints against Paul, who now found himself so effectually preserved from the fury of his countrymen, that he remained a considerable time longer in that city. After his departure Apollos, a zealous and eloquent Alexandrian Jew, came to Corinth, and was made a very powerful instrument of building up this church, and of silencing the opposition of the Jews. The modesty of this man was as conspicuous as his spirit. Till he was instructed more perfectly by Aquila and Priscilla, he knew no more of christianity than what was contained in the system of John the Baptist. That so able a man could submit to profit by others, was a proof of an humble frame.

It appears, that St. Paul so far as circumstances admitted, kept up a constant correspondence with the churches. The care of them, as he says, came upon him daily. The Corinthians wrote to him to ask his advice on some cases of conscience, and he understood, that a variety of evils and abuses had crept in among them. On these accounts he wrote the two Epistles to the Corinthians. We are astonished to find in reviewing them, how faulty many of this church were, and the scene, which they exhibit, more resembles modern than primitive times in many respects. It falls not within the design of this history to enlarge. Former writers have with more than sufficient accuracy recorded the evils, let one at least be allowed to record the good things of the church. Their exemption from persecution under Gallio, and their state of ease and prosperity, so uncommon with other churches, in a great measure account for the little spirituality of this people. Perhaps no church was more numerous, and none less holy in the apostolic age. And it may teach us not to repine at the want of the miraculous operations of the holy spirit, when we consider that these Corinthians abounded in them. But they were proud of gifts, contentious, self-conceited, and warm partizans for Paul, Apollos, or Peter, and by the indulgence of this spirit, shewed how little they had learnt of true wisdom, which gives

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the apostle occasion* to recommend the wisdom that is from above, to point out the nature and properties of spiritual understanding, and to pour a just contempt on that which is merely natural.

With the pride of false wisdom they joined a very blameable neglect in practice. One of their church lived in incest, nor was the offender excommunicated.† He rebukes them also for their litigiousness and lasciviousness.‡ In answer to their queries, he recommends celibacy as preferable to matrimony, where a man can practise it, and that I think from general reasons,§ as more favourable to holiness, without however depreciating matrimony, or giving the least countenance to the flood of monastic abuses, which afterwards prevailed in christendom. But mankind are ever prone to extremes; and the extreme opposite to superstition so much prevails at present, that I should not wonder, if some should startle at what I have mentioned as the sentiments of St. Paul, though it be impossible for any unprejudiced person to understand him otherwise.

So little were the Corinthians exposed to persecution, that they were invited by their idolatrous neighbours to partake of their idol feasts, and there were those who complied.|| There were false apostles among them, who, by pretending to instruct them gratis, endeavoured to depreciate Paul as a mercenary person.¶ Hence, while he rebukes the evils of this people, he observes that he laboured among them freely, which the false apostles pretended to do. He proceeds to correct an abuse which obtained in their assemblies, in the article of decency of dress, and another much worse, the profanation of the Lord's supper.** He insists also on the correction of their abuse of spiritual gifts, particularly those of languages.†† It appears that gifts were more prized by them in some respects than grace itself, and that love, which he beautifully describes, was at a low ebb among them. He occasionally mentions however a very common effect attendant on the preaching

* 1 Cor. four first Chapters. † Chap. v. ‡ Chap. vi. § Chap. vii.

|| 1 Cor. viii. 10. ¶ 1 Cor. ix. compared with 2 Cor. xi. 13—20.

** 1 Cor. xi. †† Chap. xii. xiii. xiv.

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of the gospel even at Corinth. If an ignorant idolater came into their assemblies, he was so penetrated with the display of the truth as it is in Jesus, that he could not but discover the very secrets of his soul; he would prostrate himself in the worship of God, and report that God was in them of a truth.* And, if where the gospel was so little honoured by the lives of its professors as at Corinth, such power attended the dispensation of it, how much more of the same kind may we suppose happened at Philippi and at Thessalonica? For we have not yet mentioned all the evils of this outwardly flourishing, but inwardly distempered church. There were some who even denied the resurrection of the body, which gives occasion to the apostle to illustrate that important article.†

Though he had promised to re-visit them soon, yet in the next epistle he assigns a reason why he delayed longer than he had intended. Their christian state was very imperfect; he wished to be enabled by their reformation to come among them with more pleasure. In truth, he wrote the first epistle in much anguish and affliction.‡ His soul was deeply affected for this people, and while their great progress in profession seemed so inconsistent with their experience and their practice, he felt the sincerest grief. He was relieved at length by the coming of Titus.§ From his account it appeared, that the admonitions were by no means fruitless. The case of the incestuous person at length was attended to by them as it ought; they proceeded even with more severity than the apostle desired, and though the man gave the strongest proof of repentance, they refused to re-admit him into their church, till he signified his express desire that they would.

It appears, that many at least of this church were recovered to a state of affection and practice worthy of

* This is a proof of the divine influence attendant on christianity. General proofs of its authenticity may be drawn also from the subject of miraculous gifts. His manner of describing these things proves their reality and their frequency. For no man could have convinced these Corinthians, that they were in possession of those gifts, if they themselves had not been conscious of them.

† Chap. xv.

‡ 2 Cor. ii. 4.

§ 2 Cor. vii.

christianity. He commends also their liberality toward the distressed christians.* But there was an obstinate party still attached to the false apostles, whose conduct extorted from him a commendation of himself, his endowments, and his office, which yet he manages with great delicacy, while he mourns the scandalous evils still existing among them.†

On his arrival at Corinth after these epistles he doubtless executed what he threatened, some wholesome severities on offenders, unless their speedy and sincere repentance prevented. He spent three months‡ in his second visit. But we have no more particular account in scripture of this church.

SECTION XII.

Rome.

IT may seem to have been purposely appointed by infinite wisdom, that our first accounts of the Roman church should be very imperfect, in order to confute the proud pretensions to universal dominion, which its bishops have, with unblushing arrogance, supported for so many ages. If a line or two in the gospels concerning the keys of St. Peter has been made the foundation of such lofty pretensions in his supposed successors to the primacy, how would they have gloried, if his labours at Rome had been so distinctly celebrated, as those of St. Paul in several churches? What bounds would have been set to the pride of ecclesiastical Rome, could she have boasted of herself as the mother church, like Jerusalem, or even exhibited such trophies of scriptural fame, as Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, or Ephesus? The silence of scripture is the more remarkable, because the church itself was in an early period by no means insignificant, either for the number or the piety of its converts. Their faith was spoken of through the whole world.§ The apostle thus commends them,

* 2 Cor. ix

† Chap. xi. xii.

‡ Acts xv.

§ Rom. i.

nor does he in his epistle intimate any thing peculiarly faulty in their principles or conduct. The epistle itself, while the world endures, will be the food of christian minds, and the richest system of doctrine to scriptural theologians. By the distinct directions which he gives for the maintenance of charity between Jews and Gentiles, it appears that there must have been a considerable number of the former among them. If one might indulge a conjecture, I should suppose that Aquila and Priscilla, who had laboured with St. Paul at Corinth, both in a spiritual and temporal sense, and had been expelled from Italy by the emperor Claudius, and whom he here salutes as at Rome, were first concerned in the plantation of this church, which was numerous, before any apostle had been there. Andronicus and Junia are saluted also in the epistle, men of character among the apostles, whose conversion were of an earlier date than St. Paul's, who were also his kinsmen, and had suffered in conjunction with him for the faith. He salutes also a number of others, though they might not all be residents of Rome. The work of divine grace in distinguishing persons of various families and connexions is ever observable. There were saints at Rome of the two families of Aristobulus and Narcissus. The former was of the royal blood of the Maccabees, and had been carried prisoner to Rome by Pompey. He himself had suffered a variety of hardships incident to a life of turbulent ambition like his; yet some of his family, of no note in civil history, are marked as the disciples of Christ, and heirs of the true riches. Narcissus is distinguished in Roman history as the ambitious prime minister of Claudius; yet some of his household were in the Lord.

Paul had long wished and even projected a visit to this church. He did not expect that his journey thither at last was to be at Cæsar's expense. Confident however he was, that when he did come to them, it should be "in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ." And he intreats the prayers of the Romans, that he may be delivered from the infidel Jews, be acceptable in his ministry to his believing countrymen at Jerusalem,

whither he was then hastening, that "he might come to them with joy by the will of God," and be with them refreshed. Thus did christians in those days entreat the prayers of their brethren through the world, and sympathize with one another. And the prayers were answered; Paul was saved from Jewish malice, was acceptable to the Jewish converts, "who had compassion on him in his bonds," and was conducted safe to Rome. At Appii Forum and the Three Taverns, he was met by the Roman christians, and thanked God and took courage,* refreshed, as he was confident he should be, when he arrived among them. None but those who know what is meant by the communion of saints, can conceive the pleasure which he felt on the occasion. After a charitable but fruitless attempt to do good to the principal Jews at Rome, he employed the two years of his imprisonment in receiving all who came to him, preaching with all confidence, and without molestation. On account of his imprisonment and examination at Rome, the nature of the gospel began to be enquired into† in Nero's court, and the conclusion of the Epistle to the Philippians makes it evident, that some of his family became christians indeed. And as the court was by no means disposed to treat him with rigour, but favoured him with some indulgences as a Roman citizen, hence many preachers in Rome and the neighbourhood exerted themselves with more courage than formerly they dared to do. Yet some even then could preach Christ with malevolent views of depreciating the apostle, others did it with sincere charity. But as some real benefit accrued to the souls of men from the labours of the former as well as of the latter, the heart of Paul (wonderful heaven-taught charity) could rejoice in both.

Some writers seem to have gone too far, in denying that Peter ever was at Rome. But the cause of protestantism needs not the support of an unreasonable scepticism. Undoubtedly the account of Peter's martyrdom there, with that of Paul, rests on a foundation

* Acts xxviii. 15.

† Philippians i.

sufficiently strong, the concurrent voice of antiquity. His first Epistle, by the close of it, seems to have been dated thence ; for the church at Babylon, according to the style of christians at that time, could be no other than Rome. Of the literal Babylon we hear nothing in those times.



SECTION XIII.

Colosse.

THIS city of Phrygia was in the neighbourhood of Laodicea and Hierapolis, and all three seem to have been converted by the ministry of Epaphras the Colossian, a companion and fellow-labourer of Paul, who attended him at Rome during his imprisonment there, and informed him of the sincerity and fruitfulness of their christian profession. For though he speaks to the Colossians only, yet the religious state of the two neighbouring cities may be conceived to be much the same. The example of Epaphras deserves to be pointed out to the imitation of all ministers. He always laboured fervently for them in prayers, "that they might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."* And this was indeed one of the best methods of evincing the sincerity of his zeal, which Paul owns to have been great for these churches.

The apostle himself, in the fulness of his charity, wishes, that the Colossians knew how strong the conflict of his soul was for them, that they might feel the comfort, understand the mystery, and enjoy the riches of the gospel.† They had never seen his face in the flesh ; but he felt for them as christian brethren, and honoured them as those in whom the word brought forth fruit, and who had a lively hope in Christ beyond the grave. But there must have been some particular dangers incident to their situation, to give propriety to the cautions in his Epistle against philosophy and vain

* Coloss. iv. 12.

† Chap. ii. 1, 2.

deceit, against Judaical dependencies and rites, and against an illegitimate humility and self-righteous austerities. Such things, he observes, carry indeed the appearance of wisdom and goodness,* but lead only to pride and extravagant self-estimation. And the tendency of them is, to draw the mind from that simplicity of dependence on Christ, which is the true rest of the soul, and the right frame of a christian.

In truth, the Jew by his ceremonies, and the Gentile by his philosophy, equally laboured to overturn the gospel of Christ. And their self-righteous efforts are then only effectually opposed, when christians know their "completeness in Christ, and walk in him." After he has delivered a number of beautiful precepts, closely interwoven with christian doctrine, he directs them to read his Epistle in their assembly, and then send it to be read by the Laodiceans, receiving themselves an Epistle from them to be read in their church, which most probably was the Epistle to the Ephesians; none of these places being at a great distance from one another.† And he gives a plain charge to Archippus their present pastor. We see hence with what care these precious apostolical remains were preserved among primitive christians; and we may conceive, in the infancy of spiritual consolation, how they fed on those lively oracles, which we now so indolently possess.

I see nothing more to be learnt from the scriptures concerning the state of this church, except the instructive anecdote in the Epistle to Philemon. This man (a Colossian christian) had a slave, one Onesimus, who deserted from his master, probably not without some depredations of his property, and wandered to Rome. That, like all great cities, was the sink which received the confluence of various vices and crimes. There the wonderful grace of God seized his heart. Providence brought him to hear Paul preach, which we have seen he did continually for two years in his imprisonment. Though former means of instruction under his christian master had failed, now at length his

eyes were opened, and he became a christian indeed. Paul would have found him an useful assistant at Rome, but thought it most proper to send him back to his master at Colosse, which he does with a short letter ; a masterpiece it is of christian politeness. In his Colossian Epistle he mentions him also as a faithful and beloved brother. What divine grace can do for men, even for slaves whom proud philosophers despised, appears from this instance.



SECTION XIV.

The Seven Churches of Asia.

THERE are some countries to which we understand that the gospel was carried during the first out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, which are incidentally mentioned without any detail of facts.

Extensive as we have seen from St. Luke's narrative the labours of the apostle were, it is evident from the Epistles, that he is far from relating the whole. We cannot learn, for instance, from the Acts, when Paul visited Crete. Yet the short Epistle to Titus, whom he left there with episcopal authority to ordain ministers in every city, and to regulate the churches, shews that that island of an hundred cities had been considerably evangelized, and many among a people proverbially deceitful, ferocious, and intemperate, had received the wholesome yoke of Christ.

And though I cannot but think, that the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, to whom St. Peter addressed his two Epistles, must mean the Jews of those countries, yet their conversion would doubtless be attended with that of many Gentiles. Of three of these we know nothing particularly ; the work of God in Galatia has been reviewed, and Asia Propria alone remains now to be considered, so far as I can discover, of all the evangelized regions mentioned in scripture-history.

It was on his first departure from Corinth, that Paul first visited Ephesus,* the first named of the seven churches of Asia, to whom St. John dedicates the book of the Revelation. His first stay was short, but the impression made on his hearers must have been remarkably great, as they pressed his longer continuance among them. He left however Aquila and Priscilla with them, whose labours were afterwards assisted by Apollos.

Paul himself returning to Ephesus, baptized in the name of Jesus about twelve disciples, who had hitherto received only John's baptism.† From this circumstance we learn, that from the first preaching of the Baptist nothing had been done in vain. The imperfect elements of that harbinger of Christ had paved the way for clearer discoveries, and a variety of preparatory works had tended to ripen the church of God into the fulness of light and holiness.

Paul preached three months in the Jewish synagogue at Ephesus, till the usual perverseness of the Jews induced him to desist, and to form the converts into a distinct church. One Tyrannus lent his school for two years, in which he daily ministered. And the whole region of Asia propria had at different times an opportunity of hearing the gospel.

In no place does the word of God seem so much to have triumphed as at Ephesus. No less numerous than those of Corinth, the believers were much more spiritual. The work of conversion was deep, vigorous, and soul-transforming to a great degree. Many, struck with the horror of former crimes, made an open confession; and many, who had dealt in the abominations of sorcery, now shewed their sincere detestation of them by burning their books before all men, the price of which amounted to a large sum. "So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed." Thus triumphs the sacred historian. Satan must have trembled for his kingdom; the emptiness of all the systems of philosophy appeared no less palpable, than the flagitiousness

* Acts xviii. 19.

† Acts xix.

of vice, and the enormities of idolatry. The spiritual power of Jesus was never seen in a stronger light since the day of Pentecost, and the venal priesthood of Diana, the celebrated goddess of Ephesus, apprehended the total ruin of their hierarchy.

No place on earth was more devoted to idolatry. A number of ingenious artists were enriched by making silver shrines for Diana. They felt a sensible diminution of their commerce, and found themselves bound by interest to support the credit of the goddess. Much people through almost all Asia had been induced to believe, that manufactured gods were mere nothings; and it seemed high time to make some strong efforts in favour of the declining superstition. They soon prevailed so far as to fill the city with tumult, and hurried two of Paul's companions with them into the theatre, where the whole mob assembled. The daring spirit of Paul would have led him into the same place. His christian friends interposed, and even some of the Asiarchs, persons who presided over the games, who had a personal esteem for the man, kindly dissuaded him. His desire seems not void of rashness, but it was the rashness of an hero, vexed to the soul to think that Gaius and Aristarchus, his two friends, were likely to suffer in his absence. Now I apprehend was that season of extreme distress, which he felt in Asia, which he describes so pathetically.* Human resources failed, and God alone he learnt could support him. The prudent and eloquent harangue of a magistrate, called the town-clerk, was the providential instrument of his deliverance. He calmed the spirit of the Ephesians, and silenced the uproar; after which Paul affectionately embraced the disciples, and left Ephesus. Three years he had laboured with great success, and left pastors to superintend that and the neighbouring churches. But he foresaw with grief, as he afterwards told these pastors in a very pathetic address, when he had sent for them to Miletus,† that their present purity would not continue unstained.

* 2 Cor. viii. 9, 10.

† Acts xx.

Wolves would enter among them to devour the flock, and among themselves heretical perverseness would find countenance, and produce pernicious separation. He did all however which man can do, warned them of the danger, and exhorted them to the persevering discharge of their duty.

The parting between the apostle and these ministers was of the most moving kind; but the elegant and affecting narrative of St. Luke is before the reader. The corruption of this excellent church seems not however to have taken place, when he wrote to them his Epistle. It is full of instruction, and, next to that to the Romans, may be looked on as a most admirable system of divinity. It has this remarkable recommendation, that it will serve for any church and for any age. Not a vestige appears in it of any thing miraculous, or exclusively primitive. The controversies of the christian world concerning doctrine would soon be decided, if men would submit to be taught by the simple, literal, and grammatical meaning of this short treatise. Every thing of doctrine and of duty is in it, and what the gospel really is, may thence be collected with the greatest certainty.

It appears that Timothy was the chief pastor at Ephesus in his absence.* The apostle's first Epistle to him throws some light on the state of this church during his administration. There were some of a Judaical and legal turn of mind, who endeavoured by contentious questions to pervert the simplicity of Evangelical faith, hope, and love. There were others in the opposite extreme; two persons are particularly characterized, Hymenæus and Alexander, who abused the profession of the faith to such open licentiousness, as to render their ejection from the church a necessary measure. So early were the churches of Christ infected with the same evils, which at this day fail not to attend the propagation of divine truth. From the directions which he gives Timothy concerning the regulation of public

* 1 Tim. i.

worship, and the character and conduct of church-officers, it appears that ecclesiastical polity had taken a firm root in this church. But modern partizans and bigots will look in vain to find their own exact model in things which the word of God hath left indifferent, or at least to be decided only by various circumstances of prudential expediency. All churches will find themselves much better employed, in attending to the practical rules, which are compatible with very different forms of government. I should suspect, that the superstitious and self-righteous spirit, which under a thousand austerities afterwards supported itself in the eastern churches, and proved one of the most powerful engines of popery, had even then begun to shew itself in Ephesus, and gave occasion to the apostolical cautions against them, as well as to the prophetic declaration of the vast increase of those evils in after-times.* It was the charitable practice of this church to maintain christian widows at the public expence. But I fear the practice had been abused. Young widows who had lived a life of ease, had thrown themselves as a burden on the church; and however high they might appear in christian profession, some of them exchanged the love of Christ for the love of the world, and the indulgence of sensuality.† As an idle life is a great source of these evils, the apostle recommends that they should rather be encouraged to enter again into the matrimonial state, which would find them useful employment, than be maintained by the church in a state of indolence. The widows who should be maintained by the public stock, he recommends to be those who were far advanced in life, of eminent laborious piety, and distinguished for their works of charity.

On the whole, we may see in this excellent church some appearances of the very worst of evils, which as yet made feeble efforts, were kept down by the superior light and grace that prevailed, and which seemed in indignant silence to be expecting future opportunities of diffusing themselves.

* 1 Tim. iv. † v. 15:

We know nothing more of this church during the remainder of St. Paul's life, nor after his death, till toward the close of the first century. St. John, the only survivor of the apostles, long continued his fatherly care of the churches of Asia Propria. During his exile at Patmos he was favoured with a magnificent vision of the Lord Jesus,* from whom he received several distinct charges addressed to the seven churches of Asia, descriptive of their spiritual state at that time, and giving suitable directions to each of them. The pastors of the churches are called angels, and what has been observable in all ages was then the case, the character of the pastors and the people was much the same. We have here then some account of the state of these churches at the close of the first century, from the highest authority. It is short, but important. Let us endeavour to comprise it into as clear a view as possible.

The Ephesians were still alive in the faith.† Attempts had been made to pervert them, but in vain. However subtle the poison of heresy be, here it could find no admission. No more could the abominations of the Nicolaitans, who appear to have been a sect of extreme moral corruption. They patiently bore the cross ever attendant on the real faith of Jesus, but could not bear any attempts made to adulterate it. The taste and spirit of the gospel continued with them ; they laboured in good works without fainting or weariness ; and their spiritual discernment was not to be imposed on by any pretences. Yet they had declined from the intenseness of that love, which they had at first exhibited. Their hearts panted not after Christ with that steady ardour which formerly had animated this people ; and with all the marks of health remaining, their vigour had much abated.

How exactly does this account agree with the common case of the best christian churches. Because it is a common case, and far from being the worst case, christians are apt to be content with such a decline, and to impute

* Rev. i.

† Rev. ii.

it to necessity, to the loss of sudden fervours of no great value, and to plume themselves on the solidity of an improved judgment. But true zeal and true charity should be shewn habitually, and not only now and then on account of occasional inroads made by the enemy, and ought to grow as the understanding is improved. The spirit of prayer, of love to Christ, of active services for his name, was now abated at Ephesus, and a cool prudence was too much magnified at the expense of charity. The salvation of real christians there was safe; but real christians should have more in view, the propagation of godliness to posterity. These cautious christians did not consider that their decline paved the way for farther and more melancholy declensions in the divine life; that the influence of their example was likely to be mischievous to those who followed, that their juniors would much more readily imitate their defects than their virtues; in fine, that a foundation was already laid for the unchurching of this people, and for the desolation in which this very region now remains under Mahometan wickedness and ignorance.

The church of Smyrna is next addressed. It was at once in a state of great purity of doctrine, and holiness of heart and life. The divine Saviour commends them in general. That toward the end of the first century they should have preserved the divine life in such vigour, a period of about forty years most probably, is somewhat extraordinary, if there had been no intermissions, and, except in the case of Philadelphia, not easily paralleled in history. So naturally does depravity prevail, in a course of time, over the best constituted churches. But their tribulation and poverty are particularly marked. They were rich in grace, poor in circumstances. If poor churches were fully sensible of the mischiefs which usually arise from the accession of the opulent, they would not plume themselves so much on that account as they often do. The Smyranean christians were chiefly of the poorer sort of inhabitants; yet were they infested with pretenders, of the same spirit as those who attempted to adulterate the gospel at Ephe-

sus. It may be sufficient to say, that they made large pretensions to pure religion, that their corruptions were Judaical, and that they were under the influence of Satan. A severe persecution this church is taught to expect, which was to last some time, and they are exhorted to persevere in faith.

The church of Pergamus was also approved of in general. They lived in the midst of a very impious people, who in effect worshipped Satan himself, and did all that in them lay to support his kingdom. Yet was the zeal of this church firm and steady. Nor was its object a few trifling punctilios, or some little niceties of doubtful disputation, but the precious name of Christ himself, and the faith of his gospel. Hence they were exposed not only to contempt, but to danger of life itself, and to cruel sufferings. Our Lord mentions one with particular complacency, "my faithful martyr Antipas." We know no more of him than what is here recorded, that "he was slain among them, where Satan dwelt." But what an honour to be thus distinguished ! Volumes of panegyric have been composed for mere statesmen, heroes, and scholars. How frigid do they all appear taken together, compared with this simple testimony of Jesus ! But this church passes not without some blame. There were some among them who, acting like Balaam of old, were employed by Satan to entice some of this church to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication ; two evils often closely connected. Some went even into the abominations of the Nicolaitans. These are exhorted to repent, from the fear of divine vengeance. On the whole, with a few exceptions, and those of no common degree of malignity, the church of Pergamus was pure and lively, and upheld the standard of truth, though encircled with the flames of martyrdom.

The church of Thyatira was in a thriving state ; charity, active services, patient dependance on God, and a steady reliance on the divine promises, marked their works ; and what is peculiarly laudable, the last was more than the first. A sounder proof of genuine religion

than such a gradual improvement can scarce be conceived. Yet it is imputed as a fault to this church, that they suffered an artful woman to seduce some into the same evils, which had infected Pergamus. Her real name we know not ; her allegorical name is Jezebel ; she resembled the wife of Ahab, who kept four hundred prophets at her table, and exerted all her influence to promote idolatry. The people of God should have counteracted her, but they did not, an advantage this, which deceitful guides have often gained through the negligence of the sincere. The very sex of the pretended prophetess was a sufficient reason, why she should have been prevented. “ Let your women keep “ silence in the churches,”* is an express prohibition of females from the office of teaching, however useful in other respects pious women may be in the church. Our Lord informs them, that he gave her space to repent, but to no purpose, and therefore now denounces severe threatenings against her and her associates, at the same time vindicating his claim to divine worship by the incommunicable title of him who searches the hearts, and declaring that he would make himself known to be such in all the churches. To those who had kept themselves unspotted from these evils, he declares he would put no other burden on them ; only he exhorts them to hold fast what they already had to the day of judgment. The unsound christians in this place pretended to great depths of knowledge, which were in reality depths of Satan. Such often impose on others, and are imposed on themselves by pretences to profound knowledge and superior degrees of sanctity.

The church of Sardis presents us with an unpleasing spectacle. Their great inferiority to Thyatira evinces, how possible it is for two societies of christians holding the same doctrines, to be in a very different state. He who “ walks in the midst of the churches,” extols the growing faith and charity of the first, and condemns the drooping condition of the second. They had neg-

* 1 Cor. xiv. 34.

lected that course of prayer and watchfulness, which is necessary to preserve the divine life in vigour. Their works were now faintly distinguishable from those of persons altogether dead in sin. Some* good things remained in them, which yet were ready to die ; but their lives brought no glory to God, nor benefit to the cause of Christ, and could scarce prevent its being scandalized in the world. A few names indeed there were in Sardis, whom Jesus looked on with complacency ; they had not defiled their garments. But most of the christians there had contracted deep stains, probably by freely mixing with the world, and conforming to its customs. And we see here an awful fact authenticated in the highest possible manner, that among a society of persons all professing the gospel, the greater part may be very dead in their souls. It should ever be remembered, that human nature is averse to real faith, heavenly hope, and genuine charity. An omnipotent energy alone can produce true holiness. This had been the case at Sardis, when the church partook of the first out-pouring of the Spirit. Quite contrary to the usual course of natural things, which are brought to perfection by slow and gradual improvements, in Christ's religion godliness starts up in the infancy of things in its best form. Seldom are the last works more than the first, as was the case at Thyatira. Heresies, refinements, human cautions, commonly adulterate the work of God. An abuse of some frantic enthusiast appears ; the correction of it by some presumptuous rationalist introduces another more specious, but more durable one. The love of the world increases with the abatement of persecution. The natural propensity of man to sin exerts itself more and more ; lively christians are removed by death ; their juniors inferior in all solid godliness, superior only in self-estimation, reduce the standard of christian grace lower and lower ; apologies are invented for sin ; what was once experimentally known, becomes matter of barren speculation ; the

very scriptural terms of vital religion are despised or sparingly used ; fainter and more polite modes of speech, better adapted to classical neatness, but proper to hide the ambiguities of scepticism, are introduced ; the pride of reasoning grows strong ; and men choose rather to run the risk of hell itself, than to be thoroughly humbled. The strong hand of God alone, in overbearing convictions and terrors, and in the sweetest, but most powerful, attractions of grace, can conquer this contemptuous spirit. No wonder then, that those who never felt, or who have quenched in a great measure these terrors and these attractions, relapse into an impatient fastidiousness. And then the influence of the holy spirit itself is reasoned against with petty cavils, and aspersed by illiberal suspicions. Those who undertake to teach in these circumstances, in attempting to discriminate the Spirit of God from delusions, will be unfeeling, rough, unskilful. To them weeds and flowers in the garden of Paradise will be the same thing. A malignant instinct of profane propensity tempts them to pull up all together, till they leave only common sense, and the love of the world. And now by frequent disuse, prayer and religious exercises grow disagreeable. Sensual and worldly objects tempt the carnal mind with success. Speculations in trade eat out the spirit of godly meditation ! the seasons of religious duty are jostled out for the throng of business, and excuses of necessity are easily admitted. Men find a pleasure in being no longer reputed fanatics, and professors will now ask leave of the world, how far it will permit them to proceed in religion without offence.

I dare not say, that all this exactly took place at Sardis ; but much of it did, no doubt ; and on occasion of this first instance of a general declension, it seemed not amiss to point out its common progress and symptoms.

Philadelphia is highly extolled. They were an humble, charitable, fervent people, deeply sensible of their own weakness, fearful of being seduced by Satan and their own hearts. He assures them, that they had a little strength, which had at once been proved and ex-

erted in holding fast the simplicity of the gospel, and in detecting and resisting all adulterations of it. They are assured that the Judaical heretics should be brought at length to submit to become their disciples in religion. And a promise of strong support is held out to them, because they had maintained a true patience in suffering. To them as to all the rest of the churches, the rewards beyond the grave are proposed as the grand motives of perseverance.

Laodicea too much resembled Sardis. They were in a lukewarm state, a religious mediocrity most odious to Christ, because his religion calls for the whole vehemence of the soul, and bids us to be cool only in worldly things. The foundation of this lukewarmness was laid in pride. They had lost the conviction of their internal blindness, misery, and depravity. When men go on for years in a placid unfeeling uniformity, this is always the case. They were satisfied with themselves, and felt no need of higher attainments. The counsel which he gives them to buy of him gold, white raiment, and eye-salve, is precious; and his call to their souls demonstrates that they had learnt to maintain in easy indolence an orthodoxy of sentiments, without any vivid attention to the Spirit of God; and his influence was only not despised in Laodicea.

Such were the situations of the seven churches of Asia. The criticism is indeed inestimable, candid, impartial, and penetrating. He who has indulged us with it, meant it for the use of all succeeding churches, and "he that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

CHAPTER II.

THE REMAINDER OF THE FIRST CENTURY.

IT is the observation of one of the ancients, that St. Luke, in the close of his apostolical history, leaves the

reader thirsting for more. I feel the force and justness of the thought at this moment. I have hitherto sailed by the compass of scripture, and now find myself at once entering into an immense ocean without a guide, and have undertaken to conduct the reader through a long course, with scarce a beacon here and there set up to direct me. But I must make the best use I can of the very scanty materials before me.

It seems plain, that the apostles in general did not leave Judea, till after the first council held at Jerusalem. They seem never to have been in haste to quit the land of their nativity. Probably the threatening appearances of its desolation by the Romans, hastened their departure into distant regions. And before the close of this century it appears, that the power of the gospel was felt throughout the Roman empire. I shall divide this chapter into four parts, and review, first, the progress and persecution of the church. Secondly, the lives, characters, and deaths of the apostles and and most celebrated evangelists. Thirdly, the heresies of this period. And, lastly, the general character of christianity in this first age.

It was about the year of our Lord 64, that the city of Rome sustained a general conflagration. The emperor Nero, lost as he was to all sense of reputation, and hacknied in flagitiousness, was yet studious to avert the infamy of being reckoned the author of this calamity, which was generally imputed to him. But no steps that he could take were sufficient to clear him. There was however a particular set of people, so singularly distinct from the rest of mankind, and so much hated on account of the condemnation which their doctrine and purity of life affixed to all except themselves, that they might be calumniated with impunity. These were then known at Rome by the name of christians. Unless we transplant ourselves into those times, we can scarce conceive how odious and contemptible the appellation then was. The judicious Tacitus calls their religion a detestable superstition,* which at first was suppressed,

* Tacitus, B. 15.

and afterwards broke out afresh, and spread not only through Judea, the origin of the evil, but through the metropolis also, the common sewer in which every thing filthy and flagitious meets and spreads. If so grave and cautious a writer as Tacitus can thus asperse the christians without proof and without moderation, we need not wonder, that so impure a wretch as Nero should not hesitate to charge them with the fact of burning Rome.

Now it was that the Romans legally persecuted the church for the first time. And those who know the virulence of man's natural enmity, will rather wonder that it commenced not earlier, than that it raged at length with such dreadful fury. "Some persons were apprehended who confessed themselves christians, and by their evidence, says Tacitus, a great multitude afterwards, and they were condemned not so much for the burning of Rome, as for being the enemies of mankind." A declaration very remarkable. True christians, though the genuine friends of the species, cannot allow men who are not true christians, to be in the favour of God. Their very earnestness in calling on their neighbours to repent and believe the gospel, proves to those neighbours in what a dangerous state they are apprehended to be at present. All who are not moved by the admonitions of christian charity to flee from the wrath to come, will naturally be disgusted, and thus the purest benevolence will be construed into the most merciless bigotry. Thus christians incurred the general hatred, to which the conduct neither of Jews nor heretics rendered them obnoxious. And the same cause produces similar effects to this day.

Their execution was aggravated with insult. They were covered with skins of wild beasts and torn by dogs, were crucified, and set on fire, that they might serve for lights in the night-time. Nero offered his gardens for this spectacle, and exhibited the games of the circus. People could not however avoid pitying them, base and undeserving as they were in the eyes of Tacitus, because they suffered not for the public good,

but to gratify the cruelty of a tyrant. It appears from a passage in Seneca* compared with Juvenal, that Nero ordered them to be covered with wax, and other combustible materials; and that, after a sharp stake was put under their chin, to make them continue upright, they were burnt alive to give light to the spectators.†

We have no account how the people of God behaved under these sufferings. What we know of their behaviour in similar scenes, leaves us in no doubt of their being supported by the power of the Holy Ghost. Nor is it credible, that the persecution would be confined to Rome. It would naturally spread through the empire, and one of Cyriac's inscriptions found in Spain,‡ demonstrates at once two important facts, that the gospel had already penetrated into that country, and that the church there also had her martyrs.

Three or four years were probably the utmost extent of this tremendous persecution, as in the year 68 the tyrant was himself, by a dreadful exit, summoned before the divine tribunal. He left the Roman world in a state of extreme confusion. Judea partook of it in an eminent manner. About forty years after our Lord's sufferings, wrath came on the body of the Jewish nation to the uttermost, in a manner too well known to need the least account in this history. What became of the christian Jews, alone concerns us. The congregation were commanded, by an oracle revealed to the best approved among them, that before the wars began, they should depart from the city, and inhabit a village beyond Jordan, called Pella.§ Thither they retired, and were saved from the destruction which soon after overwhelmed their countrymen, at once observing the precept, and fulfilling the well-known prophecy of their Saviour. The death of Nero, and the destruction of Jerusalem would naturally occasion some respite to them from their sufferings; and we hear no more of their

* Seneca, Ep. 14. Juv. 1 and 8 with his Scholiast.

† Bullet's History of Established Christianity.

‡ See Gibbon's Account of Christianity considered, p. 94

§ Euseb. B. 3. C. 5.

persecuted state, till the reign of Domitian, the last of the Flavian family, who succeeded to the empire in the year 81.

He does not appear to have raged against the christians, till the latter end of his reign. Indeed, in imitation of his father Vespasian, he made enquiry for such of the Jews as were descended from the royal line of David. His motives were evidently political. But there wanted not those who were glad of any opportunity of wreaking their malice on christians. Some persons were charged with being related to the royal family, who were brought before the emperor. They appear to have been related to our Lord, grandsons of Jude the apostle, his cousin. Domitian asked them, if they were of the family of David, which they acknowledged. He then demanded, what possessions they enjoyed, and what money they had. They laid open the poverty of their circumstances, and owned that they maintained themselves by their labour. The truth of their confession was evidenced by their hands, and their appearance in general. Domitian then interrogated them concerning Christ and his kingdom, when and where it should appear. They answered, like their Master when questioned by Pilate, that his kingdom was not of this world, but heavenly; that its glory should appear at the consummation of the world, when he should judge the quick and dead, and reward every man according to his works. Poverty is sometimes a defence against oppression, though it never shields from contempt. Domitian was satisfied, that his throne was in no danger from christian ambition, and the grandsons of Jude had the honour to be dismissed with the same sort of derision, with which their Saviour had been dismissed by Herod. Thus had the Son of God provided for his relations; they were poor in circumstances, but rich in faith, and heirs of his heavenly kingdom.

As Domitian improved in cruelty, toward the end of his reign, he renewed the horrors of Nero's persecution. He* put to death many persons accused of athe-

* Euseb. B. 111. 17. Dion Cassius.

ism, the common charge against christians, on account of their refusal to worship the Pagan gods. Among these was the consul Flavius Clemens, his cousin, who had espoused Flavia Domitilla, his relation. Suetonius observes, that this man was quite despicable on account of his slothfulness. Many others were condemned likewise, who had embraced Jewish customs, says Dion; part of them were put to death, others spoiled of their goods, and Domitilla herself was banished into the island of Pandataria. Eusebius says something of the same facts, with some little variation; but as he professes to borrow from the Pagan writers in this instance, I shall be content with their account.

It is not hard to conceive the real characters of those two noble persons; genuine christians, it ought not to be doubted, whom God had distinguished by his grace, and enabled to live upon it, and to suffer for it. The blood of the Cæsars, and the splendor of the imperial house, rendered them only more conspicuous objects of disgust. It is well that no positive crime is ascribed to either of them. The charge of indolence against the husband is natural enough, and does honour to the heavenly-mindedness of the man, whose spirit could not mix with the evils of secular ambition, and the vices of the imperial court. Men of their rank in this kingdom, if equally sincere in christianity, would be exposed to equal contempt, though from the humanity of the times, and the blessings of civil freedom, not to equal danger of life or property.

In the year 96 Domitian was slain, and Nerva, the succeeding emperor, published a pardon* for those who were condemned for impiety, recalled those who were banished, and forbade the accusing of any men on account of impiety or judaism. Others who were under accusation, or under sentence of condemnation, now escaped by the lenity of Nerva. This brings us to the close of the century, in which we behold the christians for the present in a state of external peace.

* Dion.

One person alone enjoyed not the benefit of Nerva's mildness. Domitilla still continued in exile, probably as a relation of the late tyrant, whose name was now odious through the world. Doubtless she was not forsaken of her God and Saviour.

II. The apostles and evangelists of this period, were their story distinctly known, and circumstantially related, would afford materials indeed of the rarest pleasure to every christian mind. But there never arose in the church any historians like Thucydides and Livy, to illustrate the actions of saints. Heroes and statesmen have their reward here, saints hereafter. Christ's kingdom must not appear to be of this world, and while large volumes have been filled with the exploits of heroes, and the intrigues of statesmen, those men who were the divine instruments of evangelizing souls, the New Testament history excepted, are for the most part unknown. What I can collect the reader shall see ; though he will find it is but little.

The first of the twelve apostles who suffered martyrdom, we have seen, was James the son of Zebedee, who fell a sacrifice to Herod Agrippa's ambitious desire of popularity. I recall him to the reader's memory on account of a remarkable circumstance attending his death.* The man who had drawn him before the tribunal, when he saw the readiness with which he submitted to martyrdom, was struck with remorse, and by one of those sudden conversions not infrequent amidst the remarkable out-pourings of the Spirit, was himself turned from the power of Satan to God, and confessed Christ with great cheerfulness. They were both led to execution, and in the way the accuser requested the apostle's forgiveness, which he soon obtained. James turning to him, answered, Peace be to thee, and kissed him, and they were beheaded together. The efficacy of divine grace, and the blessed fruit of holy example, are both illustrated in this story, of which it were to be wished we knew more than the very scanty account which has been delivered.

* Euseb. i 9.

The other James was preserved in Judea to a much later period. His martyrdom took place about the year 62, and his Epistle was published a little before his death. As he always resided at Jerusalem, and was providentially preserved through various persecutions, he had an opportunity of overcoming enmity itself, and abating prejudice in some measure. The name of Just was generally given him on account of his singular innocence and integrity. And as he conformed to Jewish customs with more than occasional regularity, he was by no means so odious in the eyes of his countrymen, as the apostle of the Gentiles. But could he have fully overcome the enmity, he could not have been faithful to Christ. Many Jews respected the man, and admired the fruits of the gospel in him. The root and principle was still their abhorrence, and from the account of Eusebius, the testimony of Hegesippus, an early christian historian, whom he quotes, and of Josephus, it is plain, that it was thought a pitiable thing, that so good a man should be a christian. Paul's escape from Jewish malice by appealing to Cæsar, had sharpened the spirits of this people, and they were determined to wreak their vengeance on James, who was merely a Jew, and could plead no Roman exemptions. Festus dying president of Judea, before his successor, Albinus, arrived, Ananias, the high-priest, a Sadducee, and a merciless persecutor, held the supreme power in the interim, and called a council, before which he brought James with some others, accusing them of breaking the law of Moses. But it was not easy to procure his condemnation. His holy life had long obtained the veneration of his countrymen.*

The great men were uneasy on account of the vast increase of christian converts by his means, and endeavoured to entangle him, by persuading him to mount a pinnacle of the temple, and to speak to the people, as-

* I have compared Josephus' account with that of Hegesippus, which last I think compatible enough with the former, and no way improbable, though I think he gives his character more of the ascetic, than I believe to be consistent with that of a christian apostle.

sembled at the time of the passover, against christianity. James being placed aloft, delivered a frank confession of Jesus, as then sitting at the right hand of power, and who should come in the clouds of heaven. Upon this Ananias and the rulers were highly incensed. To disgrace his character was their first intention. This had failed. To murder his person was the next, and the attempt was of much more easy execution. Crying out, that Justus himself was seduced, they threw him down, and stoned him. The apostle had strength to fall on his knees, and to pray, "I beseech thee, Lord God and Father, for them; for they know not what they do." One of the priests, moved with the scene, cried out, "Cease, what do you mean? This just man is praying for you." A person present with a fuller's club beat out his brains, and completed his martyrdom.

Very remarkable is the acknowledgment of Josephus. "These things" (meaning the miseries of the Jews from the Romans) "happened to them by way of revenging the death of James the Just, the brother of Jesus, whom they call Christ. For the Jews slew him though a very just man."* And from the same

* I see no reason to doubt the authenticity of this passage; which gives abundant confirmation to his famous testimony of Christ; which is as follows. "About this time lived Jesus a wise man; if indeed we may call him a man; for he performed marvellous things; he was an instructor of such as embraced the truth with pleasure. He made many converts both among the Jews and Greeks. This was the Christ. And when Pilate, on the accusation of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those who before entertained a respect for him continued still so to do; for he appeared to them alive again on the third day; the divine prophets having declared these and many other wonderful things concerning him. And the sect of christians so named from him subsists to this very time."

I have examined as carefully as I can the doubts which have been started on the authenticity of this passage. To me they seem mere surmises. One of them, the supposed inconsistency of the historian, in testifying so much of Christ, and yet remaining an unconverted Jew, affords an argument in its favour. Inconsistencies ought to be expected from inconsistent persons. Such are many in the christian world at this day, who in like circumstances would have acted a similar part. Such was Josephus. He knew and had studied something of all sorts of opinions in religion, and his writings shew him to have been firm in nothing but a regard to his worldly interest. To me he seems to say just so much and no more of Christ, as might be expected from a learned skeptic, of sound common good sense, and supreme love of worldly things.

writer we learn, that Albinus severely reprimanded Ananias, and soon after deprived him of the high-priesthood.

After the death of James, and the desolation of Jerusalem, the apostles and disciples of our Lord, of whom many were yet alive, gathered themselves together with our Lord's kinsman, to appoint a pastor of the church of Jerusalem in the room of James. The election fell on Simeon, the son of that Cleopas mentioned by St. Luke, as one of the two who went to Emmaus, and who was the brother of Joseph, our Lord's reputed father. We shall leave Simeon, the chief pastor of the Jewish church, at the end of this century.

Paul the apostle seems to have laboured with unwearied activity from about the year 36 to the year 63, that is, from his conversion to the period in which St. Luke finishes his history. Within this period he wrote fourteen Epistles, which will be the blessed means of feeding the souls of the faithful to the end of time. The Second Epistle to Timothy has been commonly supposed to have been written just before his martyrdom. I am convinced by Dr. Lardner's reasonings,* that it was more probably written during his two years imprisonment at Rome, and that he was under no particular apprehension of suffering immediately.† From this Epistle it is evident, that he had already been called before Nero, agreeably to the prediction, "thou must be brought before Cæsar;" and that no christian, not even any of those who had welcomed his arrival in Italy, durst appear for him; he feelingly complains "all men forsook me," Yet he knew how to distinguish between malevolence and timidity; and therefore, though he could not excuse their neglect of him, he prays God that it might not be laid to their charge. The terror of Nero seems to have struck the Roman christians, many of whom might have borne witness in his favour. Even Demas forsook him, from the love of the world, and departed to Thessalonica. There are seasons of critical danger, which try the hearts of the truest chris-

* See the Supplement to the Credibility.

† This seems evident by his charging Timothy to come to him before winter.

tians. It was yet a new thing for a christian to be brought before an emperor, and they had not prepared themselves by watching and prayer for the uncommon occasion. But the grace of the Lord Jesus, which had hitherto been so eminently with the apostle, forsook him not in his trying moments. The Lord "stood with him, and strengthened him."* He was enabled to testify for Christ and his gospel before Nero, with the same frankness, fortitude, and eloquence, that he had done before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. And for the first time, and probably the last, the murderous tyrant Nero heard the glad tidings of salvation. It seems by the expression, "that all the Gentiles might hear," that Paul was heard in a very full and solemn assembly, and had an opportunity of giving a clear account of christianity. And as some of Cæsar's household are mentioned as saints in the Epistle to the Philippians, there is reason to apprehend, that the preaching was not in vain. He was, as he owns, "delivered from the mouth of the lion." Nero had not then begun to persecute, and at least would see the justness of his plea as a Roman citizen, and be disposed to favour it. Nor ought the adorable Providence of God to be passed in silence, who gave this man of abandoned wickedness an opportunity of hearing the word of salvation, though it made no useful impression on his mind. Paul seems to have had this audience during the former part of his imprisonment at Rome, and to have been remanded to his confinement for the present.

Here he wrote the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians before the end of the year 62. From the former of these it appears, that the whole court of Nero was made acquainted with his case, and that the cause of the gospel was promoted by this means. In the Epistle to Philemon, which accompanied that to the Colossians, he expresses a confidence of being soon set at liberty, and promises in that case shortly to pay them a visit.† And

* 2 Tim. iv. 17.

† I follow Dr. Lardner in the dates of the Epistles, which he has investigated with singular diligence and sagacity; and I once for all acknowledge my repeated obligations to him in things of this nature.

as he mentions Demas with respect as his fellow-labourer, both in this Epistle to the Colossians, and in that to Philemon, I apprehend Demas had repented of his pusillanimity, and was returned to the apostle and to his duty. This is the second case in which it pleased God to make use of this extraordinary man for the preservation of the church. The former respected the doctrine of justification, from which even apostles were indirectly declining, as this does the godly spirit of zeal and open confession of Christ. Such is the sloth and cowardice of man in divine things, and so little need is there to teach us prudential wisdom, that unless God now and then stirred up the spirits of some eminent christian heroes, to venture through all difficulties, and stand foremost for the truth against all opposition, Satan would bear down all before him. Paul was one of the first of these heroes, and we shall see in every age, that God raises up some of this hardy temper, whom the world is ever pleased to call fanatics, for shewing that greatness of soul in an heavenly cause, which in an earthly one they would admire.

Having obtained his liberty in the year 63, he most probably would soon fulfil his promise to visit the Hebrews; after which he might see his Colossian friends. There is no certain account of his coming either to Jerusalem or to Colosse; but most probably he executed what he had a little before promised. That he ever visited Spain or our Island, is, to say no more, extremely doubtful. Of the last there is a *very* unfounded report, and of the former no other proof, than the mention of his intention in the Epistle to the Romans, which had been written in the year 58, since which time all his measures had been broken. And if he once more made an Asiatic tour after his departure from Rome, there seems not time enough for his accomplishing the western journey, as he suffered martyrdom on his return to Rome in 64 or 65. He could have had no great pleasure at Jerusalem; every thing was there hastening to ruin. No man was ever possessed of a more genuine patriotic spirit than this apostle. The Jewish war, which com-

menced in 66, would have much afflicted him, had he lived to see it. But returning to Rome about a year before, he fell in with the very time when Rome was burnt, and christians were accused as incendiaries. He now found no mercy in Nero, who would naturally be displeased at the effect, which he had observed his preaching had produced in his own family. A cup-bearer and a concubine of his had been, through Paul's means, converted to the faith, as Chrysostom assures us; and this hastened his death. He was slain with the sword by Nero's order.*

He had many fellow-labourers, whose names he has immortalized in his writings. Timothy was a particular favourite, whom antiquity regards as the first bishop of Ephesus, as it does Titus as the first bishop of Crete.† Luke of Antioch, the beloved physician, was another, the writer of the third gospel, and the faithful relater of this apostle's transactions, of which he was an eye-witness, in the Acts of the Apostles. He seems to have retired into Greece after St. Paul's first dismissal by the emperor, and there to have written both his estimable treatises about the year 63 or 64.

Crescens, whom Paul sent to Galatia, is another of his fellow-labourers. Linus, the first bishop of Rome, may be added to the list, and Dionysius the Arcopagite of Athens, whom Eusebius reckons the first bishop of the church in that city.

We have finished the lives of two men, of singular excellence surely, James the Just, and Paul of Tarsus. The former, by his uncommon virtues, attracted the esteem of a whole people, who were full of the strongest prejudices against him; and the latter—has such a man ever existed among all those, who have inherited the corrupted nature of Adam? He had evidently a soul of a large and capacious kind, possessed of those seemingly contradictory excellencies which, wherever they appear in combination, fail not to form an extraordinary character. Doubtless both his parts and his

* Orosius, B. 7.

† Euseb. iv. 3.

learning were very great, and many with half his abilities have effected national revolutions, and distinguished themselves in the history of mankind. His consummate fortitude was tempered with the rarest gentleness, and the most active charity. His very copious and vivid imagination was chastised by the most accurate judgment, and was connected with the closest argumentative powers. Divine grace alone could cause so wonderful a temperature, insomuch, that for the space of near thirty years after his conversion, this man, whose haughtiness and fiery temper had hurried him into a very sanguinary course of persecution, lived the friend of mankind, returned good for evil continually, the model of patience and benevolence, and steadily attentive only to heavenly things, while yet he had a taste, a spirit, and a genius, which might have shone among the greatest statesmen and men of letters that ever lived.

We have then in these two men, a strong specimen of what grace can do, and we may fairly challenge all the infidels in the world, to produce any thing like them in the whole list of their heroes. Yet amidst the constant display of every godly and social virtue, we learn from Paul's own account, that he ever felt himself "carnal, sold under sin," and that sin dwelt in him continually. From his writings we learn, what the depth of human wickedness is; and none of the apostles seem to have understood so much as he did, the riches of divine grace, and the peculiar glory of the christian religion. The doctrines of election, justification, regeneration, adoption; of the priesthood and offices of Christ, and of the internal work of the Holy Ghost, as well as the most perfect morality founded on christian principle, are to be found in his writings, and what Quintilian said of Cicero may be justly applied to the apostle of the Gentiles: "*Ille se profecisse sciat, cui Paulus valde placebit.*"

During this whole out-pouring of the spirit (of so little account in the sight of God are natural human excellencies and talents) I see no evidence of any persons being employed in it of extraordinary genius and

endowments, St. Paul excepted. St. Luke indeed appears by his writings to have been a classical scholar, of a chastised and regular taste, a neat and elegant writer, who approaches more nearly to attic purity of diction than any of the New Testament writers. To St. Paul the greatness of his thoughts, and the fervour of his zeal, give a magnificent kind of negligence in composition, in the midst of which there is, if I mistake not, a vast assemblage of the most sublime excellencies of oratory, and the plainest evidence how high he might have stood in the line of eminence, had he been ambitious, or rather had he not been perfectly careless of such kind of fame. But that such unlearned men as the rest of the apostles were, none of whom appear by nature to have been above the rest of mankind, though none of them wanting in common faculties, should have been able of themselves to speak, to act, and to write as they did, and produce such an amazing revolution in the ideas and manners of mankind, would require the most extravagant credulity to admit. The power of God is demonstrated from the imbecility of the instruments.

The minds of men void of the love of God are always apt to suspect of fanaticism the most precious mysteries of the gospel, and the whole of experimental religion. And the more vigorously these things are described, the stronger the suspicion grows. May not this have been one reason why Paul was directed to expose himself the most to this unjust censure, by dwelling more copiously than any of the rest on views most directly evangelical, who yet must be allowed by all who are not willing to betray their own want of discernment, to have been a man of eminent solidity of understanding. If christian experience be a foolish thing indeed, it is strange that the wisest of all the christians should have been the largest in describing it.

Of St. Peter we have by no means so large an account as of St. Paul. The last view we have of him in scripture presents him to us at Antioch. This was

probably about the year 50. After this he was employed in spreading the gospel principally among his own countrymen, but one cannot suppose exclusively of Gentiles, in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. His two Epistles were directed to the Hebrew converts of these countries. And if he was far less successful than Paul among the Gentiles, he was much more so than he among the Jews. He who wrought effectually in the one among the former, was mighty in the other among the latter.* It should ever be remembered, who alone did the work, and gave the increase.

Peter probably came to Rome about the year 63. Thence a little before his martyrdom he wrote his two Epistles. Strange fictions have been invented of his acts at Rome, of which I shall sufficiently testify my disbelief by silence, the method which I intend constantly to use in things of this nature. It is evident, however, that he here met again with that Simon the sorcerer whom he had rebuked long ago in Samaria, and who was practising his sorceries in a much higher style in the metropolis. No doubt the apostle opposed him successfully, but we must be content with a very vague and declamatory account of it from Eusebius, for want of a better. At length, when Paul was martyred under Nero, Peter suffered with him by crucifixion with his head downward, a kind of death which he himself desired, most probably from an unfeigned humility, that he might not die in the same manner as his Lord had done. Nicephorus informs us, that he had spent two years at Rome. In his Second Epistle he observes, that his Lord had shewn him, that his death was soon to take place. And this gives a degree of credibility to a story of Ambrose related in one of his discourses, the purport of which is, that the Pagans being inflamed against him, the brethren begged him to retreat during the violence of the persecution. Their intreaties moved him, ardent as he was for martyrdom. He began

to go out of the city by night. But coming to the gate,* he saw Christ entering into the city. Whereupon he said, Lord, whither art thou going? Christ answered, I am coming hither to be crucified again. Peter hence understood, that Christ was to be crucified again in his servant. This induced him voluntarily to return, and he satisfied the minds of the brethren with this account, and was soon after seized and crucified. Whoever considers the very solemn manner in which our Lord foretold the violent death of this apostle, in the close of St. John's gospel, and that in his Second Epistle he himself declares that his divine Master had shewn him, that he should publicly put off his tabernacle, will find no difficulty in conceiving, that the vision now related from Ambrose (for Christ's appearance need not to be imagined any more) might have taken place a little time before the writing of this Epistle, as that may have a little time preceded his apprehension and violent death. I mention this as a probable conjecture only. The story itself is consonant to the miraculous powers then in the church, and its evidence rests on the character of Ambrose himself, an Italian bishop, whose integrity and understanding are equally respectable.

Peter's wife had been called to martyrdom a little before himself. He saw her led to death, and rejoiced at the grace of God vouchsafed to her, and addressing her by name, exhorted and comforted her with, Remember the Lord.†

There are two striking attestations to the character of Peter, which may be fairly drawn from the sacred writings. As it is allowed on all hands, that he authorized the publication of St. Mark's gospel, had he been disposed to spare his own character, he had not suffered the shameful denial of his Master to have been described, as it is in that evangelist, with more aggravated circumstances of guilt, and with fainter views of his repentance, than are to be found in the other evangelists. I am indebted for the other remark to bishop Gregory, the

* Sermon cont. Aux. i. 11.

† Clement Strom. 7.

first of that name. In his Second Epistle he gives the most honourable attestation to the apostle Paul's Epistles, though he must know, that in one of them, that to the Galatians, his own conduct on a particular occasion was censured. This is evidently above nature. The most unfeigned humility appears to have been an eminent part of the character of this apostle, who in his early days was remarkable for the forwardness of his temper. His natural character was no uncommon one. Frank, open, active, courageous, sanguine in his attachments and in his passions, no way deficient, but not eminent in understanding, a plain, honest man, yet, by grace and wisdom supernatural, made only inferior to Paul, and an instrument of the greatest good in the conversion of numbers. He seems to have lived long in a state of matrimony, and by Clement's account, was industrious in the education of his children.

Mark was sister's son to Barnabas, the son of Mary, a pious woman of Jerusalem. He was probably brought up in christianity from early life, and his conduct for some time gives a credibility to an opinion, tolerably confirmed by experience, that early converts, or those who have been religiously brought up, do not make that vigorous progress in divine things generally, which those do, whose conversion has commenced after a life of much sin and vanity. Their views are apt to be faint, and their dispositions in religion languid and indolent. We are told by Epiphanius, that Mark was one of those who were offended at the words of Christ recorded in the 6th chapter of St. John, then forsook him, but was afterwards recovered by means of Peter. After our Lord's ascension, he attended his uncle Barnabas with Paul; but soon left them and returned to Jerusalem. Barnabas however hoping the best from one, whom he held so dear, proposed him to Paul as their companion on some future occasion. After the rupture which this occasioned between the two apostles, Barnabas took him with him to Cyprus.

Undoubtedly his character improved. Some plants are of slow growth, but attain at length great vigour,

and bear much fruit. Even Paul himself, who had been so much offended with him, at length declared, He is profitable to me for the ministry.* From the Epistle to the Colossians, it is evident that he was with the apostle in his imprisonment at Rome. This was in the year 62. His gospel was written by the desire of the believers at Rome about two years after. I know not when to fix the time of his coming to Egypt. But he is allowed to have founded the church of Alexandria, and to have been buried there. He was succeeded by Anianus, of whom Eusebius gives the highest eulogium. It is evident, that the society of those three great men, Barnabas, Paul, and Peter, at different times was very useful to him. Probably his natural indolence needed such incentives. We seem to have observed then one of the first promoters of christianity, of a cast of mind different from any we have hitherto reviewed. And the variety of tempers and talents employed in the service of God, and sanctified by the same divine energy, affords a field of speculation neither unpleasing nor unprofitable.

Of the labours of eight apostles, nothing in a manner is recorded, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, Jude, Simon, and Matthias.

Of John the apostle a few valuable fragments may be collected. He was present at the council of Jerusalem, which was held about the year 50, nor is it probable that he left Judea till that time. Asia Minor was the great theatre of his ministry, particularly Ephesus, the care of which church remained with him after the decease of the rest of the apostles. The breaking out of the war in Judea would probably oblige the apostle to bid a total farewell to his native country. While he resided at Ephesus, going once to bathe there, and perceiving that Cerinthus was in the bath, he came out again hastily. Let us flee, says he, lest the bath should fall, while Cerinthus, an enemy of truth, is within. The story is told of Ebion as well as Cerinthus; they were

* 2 Tim. iv. 2.

both heretics, and of a similar character. It is an easy mistake for a reporter of the story to confound the one with the other ; but it is not easy to be accounted for, that the whole should have had no foundation. For the testimony of Irenæus, who had it from persons who were informed of it by Polycarp, the disciple of St. John, seems sufficiently authentic. Irenæus evidently believed the story himself ; and I think the judgment of one who lived near those times, a man too of exquisite judgment, must outweigh the criticisms of all modern authors. The fashion of the age, humanely skeptical, and clothing profane indifference with the name of candour, is ever ready to seduce even good men into a disbelief of stories of this nature, however well attested. But let the circumstances of St. John be considered. He was a surviving apostolical luminary. Heretical depravity was deeply spreading its poison. Sentiments, very derogatory to the person, work, and honour of Jesus Christ, were diffused with great perverseness of industry. What should the charitable apostle do ? I apprehend, that he would have been forward to relieve the distresses of the most malignant heretic in the world. But to have joined the company of the principal supporters of heresy, would have been to countenance it. He well knew the usual arts of seducers. They were ready always to avail themselves of the seeming countenance of apostles or apostolical men, and thence to take an opportunity of strengthening themselves, and diffusing their poison. Such has been their conduct in all ages. Having no ground of their own to stand on, they continually endeavoured to rest on the authorities of this or that great man, of allowed evangelical respectability. Their artful conduct, clothed with the pretence of charity, points out to the real friends of the Lord Jesus, what they ought to do, from motives of real benevolence to mankind, patiently to bear the odious charge of bigotry, and to take every opportunity of testifying their abhorrence of their views. Humanly speaking, I see not how divine truth is to be supported in the world, but

by this procedure ; and I scruple not to say, that St. John's conduct appears not only defensible, but laudable, and worthy the imitation of all christians. And it is agreeable to what he himself declares. He says in one of his short Epistles, addressed to a christian lady, that if "any come to her house, and bring not the true doctrine of the gospel, she ought not to receive him, nor bid him God speed, because to bid him God speed, would make her partaker of his evil deeds." His menacing language concerning Diotrophes, in the other Epistle to Gaius, breathes what some would call the same uncharitable spirit. And when I see St. Paul shaking his garment against the infidel Jews, and hear him saying, "Your blood be on your own heads, I am clean ;" and when I find him saying to the Galatians, "If an angel from heaven should preach any other doctrine, let him be accursed," and wishing that they were even cut off which troubled them, I am prepared what to think of the holy John's indignation against Cerinthus.

Indeed the primitive christians were even more careful to avoid the society of false christians than of open unbelievers. With the latter they had at times some free intercourse, with the former refused even to eat.* And we have already seen, how our Saviour commends the impatience of the Ephesians, who could not bear false professors, who had tried those who call themselves "apostles, and are not, and had found them liars."

It is one of the designs of this history, to shew the real conduct of christians in life ; and the fact before us, of John's behaviour to Cerinthus, illustrates this. But if we must so far humour the taste of Socinians and skeptics, as to allow ourselves to doubt of the truth of well-attested facts, because they contradict the fashionable torrent, we shall injure the truth of history, make present manners the standard of credibility, and seem to agree to a very absurd, modish position, that charity is the same thing as humanity. And I would

* 1 Cor. v. 10, 11.

ask any, to whom the infection of modern manners renders this reasoning of difficult digestion, whether he should more approve of the conduct of one gentleman, who should mix in easy familiarity with a company of murderers, or of another, who should fly from it with horror. If we believe spiritual murderers, who labour to ruin souls by propagating anti-christian views, to be even more pernicious than the former, we shall not be under any difficulty to vindicate St. John.

We have seen one action of this apostle unreasonably doubted of in our times, through the prevalence of heresy. Another comes before us loaded with the same skeptical objections, through the prevalence of deism. Tertullian* tells us, that by order of Domitian, John was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil, and came out again without being hurt. This must have happened most probably during the latter part of his reign. Tertullian was certainly competent to relate such a fact as this. It is now generally disbelieved or doubted. But why? We see no miracles in our times; but let the reader transport himself into the first century, and he will see no more improbability in the nature of the thing for this miracle exerted in favour of John, than for another in favour of Paul, recorded in the last chapter of the Acts. The miracle softened not the heart of Domitian, who would probably suppose the apostle to have been fortified by some magical incantations. He banished him into the solitary isle of Patmos, where he was favoured with the visions of the Apocalypse. After Domitian's death he returned from Patmos and governed the Asiatic churches. There he remained till the time of Trajan. At the request of the bishops, he went to the neighbouring churches, partly to ordain pastors, and partly to regulate the congregations. At one place in his tour observing a remarkable handsome young person, he warmly recommended him to the care of a particular pastor. The young man was baptized, and for a time lived as a

* Præscript. Hær.

christian. But being gradually corrupted by company, he became idle, intemperate, and at length so dishonest, as to become a captain of a band of robbers. Some time after John had occasion to inquire of the pastor concerning the young man, who told him, that he was now dead to God, and inhabited a mountain over against his church.* John in the vehemence of his charity, went to the place, and exposed himself to be taken by the robbers. Bring me, says he, to your captain, who beheld him coming. As soon as he knew the apostle, he was struck with shame and fled. The aged apostle following him cried, My son, why flyest thou from thy father unarmed and old? Fear not, as yet there remaineth hope of salvation. Believe me, Christ hath sent me. Hearing this, the young man stood still, trembled, and wept bitterly. John prayed, exhorted, and brought him back to the society of christians, nor did he leave him, till he found him fully restored by divine grace.

Even the truth of this story has been questioned by Basnage. But as I know no reason for hesitation, I shall leave it with the serious reader, who loves to behold the tokens of grace from age to age dispensed to sinners.

We have yet another story of St. John, short, but pleasing, and which has had the good fortune to pass uncontradicted. Being now very old, and unable to say much in christian assemblies, "Children love one another," was his constantly repeated sermon. Being asked why he told them only one thing, he answered that nothing else was needed. This story rests on the single testimony of Jerom, so far as I have found. But as it seems to fall in with the spirit of the age more than the others, its truth is allowed. We may hence observe, how little regard is paid to real evidence by many critics, who seem to make modern manners the test of historical credibility. Whatever fact shews the spirit of zeal, the reality of miracles, or the work of the divine Spirit on the heart, must be questioned.

* Clem. Alex. apud Euseb.

What indicates benevolence alone, must be allowed to stand its ground. In truth, I should be sorry to have so beautiful a story called in question, but its evidences are not superior to those of the three former.

John lived three or four years after his return to Asia, having been preserved to the age of an hundred years for the benefit of the church of Christ, a pattern of charity and goodness, greater than I know how to describe.

Of the apostle Barnabas, nothing is known, except what is recorded in the Acts. There we have an honourable encomium of his character, and a particular description of his joint labours with St. Paul. It is a great injury to him, to apprehend the Epistle which goes by his name, to be his.

The work of Hermas, though probably written by the person mentioned in the Epistle to the Romans, and truly pious, is yet a composition of inferior merit, nor is it worth while to detain the reader upon it. Indeed we have no ecclesiastical work, exclusive of the scriptures, except one, which does any peculiar honour to the first century. To believe, to suffer, to love, not to write, was the primitive taste.

The work which I except is Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians. This is he, whom Paul calls his fellow-labourer, whose "name is in the book of life."* He long survived Paul and Peter, and was no doubt a blessing to the Roman church, over which he presided nine years. His Epistle was read in many primitive churches, and was admired exceedingly by the ancients. It has a simplicity and a plainness, not easily relished by a systematic modern, but which has a wonderful depth of holiness and wisdom. A few quotations relating to its history, its doctrine, and its spirit, will not improperly close this account of the pastors of the first century.

Its history will bring again to our view the church of Corinth, which we have already seen distracted with schisms and contentions, and more than any other prin-

* Philp. iv.

itive church, disgracing its high calling with secular ambition. From the testimony of Clement it appears, that St. Paul's two Epistles had been abundantly useful, and that he had reason to rejoice in the confidence which he reposed in the sincerity of profession, which prevailed in many of them, notwithstanding these evils. The account which he gives of their good situation, may justly be considered as the proper fruit of apostolical admonitions. "What strangers that came among you, did not take honourable notice once of the firmness and fulness of your faith? Who of them did not admire the sobriety and gentleness of your godly spirit in Christ? Who did not extol the liberal practice of your christian hospitality? How admirable was your sound and mature knowledge of divine things? Ye were wont to do all things without respect to persons, and ye walked in the ways of God in due subjection to your pastors, and submitting yourselves the younger to the elder. Ye charged young men to attend to the gravity and moderation becoming the christian character; young women to discharge their duties with a blameless, holy, and chaste conscientiousness, loving their husbands with all suitable tenderness and fidelity, and to guide the house in all soberness and gravity. Then ye all shewed an humble spirit, void of boasting and arrogance, more ready to obey than to command, more ready to give than to receive. Content with the divine allotments, and attending diligently to his word, ye were enlarged in your bowels of love, and his sufferings on the cross were before your eyes. Hence a profound and happy peace was imparted to you all, an unwearied desire of doing good, and a full outpouring of the Holy Ghost was with you. Full of holy counsel, in all readiness of mind, with godly assurance of faith, yet stretched forth your hands to the Lord Almighty, intreating him to be gracious to you, if in any thing ye unwillingly offended. Your care was day and night for all the brethren, that the number of his elect might be saved in mercy and a good

“conscience. Ye were indeed sincere and harmless, and forgiving one another. All dissension and schism in the church was abominable to you; ye mourned over the faults of your neighbours; their infirmities ye sympathized with as your own; ye were unwearied in all goodness, and ready to every good work. Adorned with a venerable and upright conversation, ye performed all things in his fear, and the law of God was written deep indeed on the tables of your hearts.”

It is pleasing to see this numerous church, of whom our Saviour had so long ago declared, that he had much people in this city, still toward the close of the century alive in the faith, hope, and charity of the gospel, free in a great degree from the evils, which had cost St. Paul so much care and grief, and preserving the vigour of true christianity. But history must be faithful, and their decline is described in the same Epistle. Pride and a schismatical spirit, which have since tarnished so many churches, and which were evils particularly Corinthian, defaced this agreeable picture. But let Clement speak for himself:

“Thus when all glory and enlargement were given to you, that scripture was fulfilled, *Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked*. Hence envy, strife, dissension, persecution, disorder, war, and desolation have seized your church. *The child has behaved himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable, the mean against the eminent, and the foolish against the wise*. Hence righteousness and peace are far from you, because ye all leave the fear of God, and your spiritual sight is become too dim to be guided by the faith of the gospel. Ye walk not in his ordinances, nor walk worthy of the Lord Christ, but ye all walk too much according to your own evil lusts, nourishing and cherishing a malignant spirit of envy, by which the first death came into the world.”

The schism pregnant with so many evils gave occasion to this Epistle. It seems the distracted church asked counsel of the church of Rome, and her venera-

ble pastor wrote this Epistle in consequence of their request. He apologizes indeed for the delay of writing, which he imputes to the afflictions and distresses which befel the church of Rome, most probably on account of Domitian's persecution, the letter itself being written about the year 94. In these times the sin of schism was looked on with the greatest horror. Clement calls the promoters of it "the haughty, disorderly leaders of the abominable schism." It is no trifling evil, which men incur, by precipitately giving up themselves to the will of those, whose aim is strife, and the advancement of a sect or party, not the interest of godliness. He speaks of those, who talk of peace with their lips, while their conduct shews, that they love to break the unity of the church, like those hypocrites, who draw nigh to "the Lord with their lips, while their heart is far from him."

The attentive reader cannot but observe, how much of the same evil in our days prevails to the great injury of real piety, and yet how little it is deplored, rather how encouraged and promoted by specious representations of liberty, of the right of private judgment, of a just contempt of implicit faith, and pleas of conscience. Yet it is certain, that these things have their weight, and ought to be most seriously attended to, when we are really called on in the path of duty. It is not my province to explain the middle path in this subject, but it is certain, that modern evangelical churches are far gone into the vicious extreme of schism.

Vera rerum vocabula amissimus. SALLUST.

To encourage separations from faithful pastors, ought to be the shame, but it is the glory of many. And perhaps an humble spirit will from Clement himself acquire sufficient instruction, how to discriminate the spirit of conscientious zeal from that of schism, and to know when they ought not to separate from the church to which they belong. "The apostles," says he, "with the greatest care ordained the rulers of the church, and

“delivered a rule of succession in future, that after
 “their decease other approved men might succeed.
 “Those then who were ordained by them, or in suc-
 “cession by other choice rulers of the church, with the
 “approbation and concurrence of the whole church, and
 “who in a blameless conduct have ministered to the flock
 “of Christ in humility, who for a series of years have
 “been well reported of by all men, these we think it
 “unrighteous to deprive of the ministry. Nor is it a
 “sin of small magnitude, to eject from the sacred office,
 “men whose ministry hath been thus blameless and
 “holy. Happy those presbyters, who have finished
 “their course, departing in peace, and in the fruitful
 “discharge of their office. They at least, remote from
 “envy and faction, are not subject to popular caprice,
 “nor exposed to the danger of out-living the affections
 “of their flock, and their own fruitfulness. We see
 “with grief, brethren, that ye have deprived of the min-
 “istry some of your godly pastors, whose labours for
 “your souls deserved a different treatment.” And he
 goes on to shew, that godly men in scripture, “were per-
 “secuted, but by the wicked, were imprisoned, but by
 “the unholy, were stoned, but by the enemies of God,
 “were murdered, but by the profane. Was Daniel
 “cast into the den of lions by men who feared God?
 “Were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego cast into
 “the midst of the burning fiery furnace, by men who
 “worshipped the Most High?”

What the sin of schism is, in what manner the Co-
 rinthians were guilty of it, and how far all this is appli-
 cable to the case of churches at this day, will need no
 comment. He afterwards reminds them of their former
 guilt in St. Paul's time. “Do take up the writings of
 “the blessed apostle, what did he say to you in the be-
 “ginning of the gospel? Truly, by divine inspiration,
 “he gave you directions concerning himself, and Ce-
 “phas, and Apollos, because even then ye were splitting
 “into parties. But your party-spirit had then less evil
 “in it, because it was exercised towards apostles of em-
 “inent holiness, and towards one much approved of by

“them. But now consider who they are that have sub-
 “verted you, and broken the bonds of brotherly love.
 “They are shameful things, brethren, very shameful:
 “Oh tell it not on christian ground, that the ancient
 “and flourishing church of Corinth has fallen out with
 “their pastors, from a weak partiality for one or two
 “persons. This rumour hath not only reached us chris-
 “tians, but is spread among infidels, so that the name of
 “God is blasphemed through your folly, and your own
 “spiritual health is endangered indeed.” After exhort-
 ing them with much pathos to heal the breaches, he
 toward the close beseeches them “to send back our mes-
 “sengers shortly in peace with joy, that they may quick-
 “ly bring us the news of your concord, which we so ar-
 “dently long for, that we may speedily rejoice on your
 “account.” What effect this had on the Corinthians,
 we know not. Yet I repent not of quoting so much
 of the Epistle as may shew the whole history of the
 schism. The spirit of declension from simple chris-
 tianity, and the way by which the Spirit of God is
 commonly provoked to depart from churches once
 flourishing in holiness, is well described. Human na-
 ture we see too to have been always the same. And a
 standing admonition is afforded to christian churches
 to beware of that nice, factious, and licentious spirit,
 which, under pretence of superior discernment and re-
 gard for liberty of conscience, has often broken the
 bonds of peace, and sometimes subjected the best of
 pastors to suffer from a people professing godliness,
 what might have been expected only from persons alto-
 gether impious and profane.

He occasionally introduces also a piece of history,
 which I need not apologize for giving the reader. “Set
 “before your eyes the holy apostles. Through envy
 “Peter underwent a variety of afflictions, and having
 “suffered martyrdom, went to the due place of glory.
 “Through envy Paul obtained at length the reward of
 “his patience, having seven times been cast into chains,
 “being scourged, stoned, having preached the gospel
 “in the east and the west, he obtained a good report

“through faith, preaching righteousness through the world to the utmost bounds of the west; and suffering martyrdom from princes, he left this world, and reached the shore of a blessed immortality, the most eminent pattern of those who suffer for righteousness’ sake. Through the godly conversation and labours of these men, a great multitude of the elect was gathered together, who through envy were afflicted with cruel torments, and obtained a good report through faith among us. Through the same evil principle, even women among us have sustained the most cruel and unrighteous sufferings, and finished in patient faith their course, and received, notwithstanding the weakness of their sex, the prize of christian heroes.”

The nature of the Epistle being practical, and those to whom it was written not being corrupted in their sentiments, much of doctrine in any accurate method is not to be expected. Yet we may see the fundamentals of godliness. Salvation only by the blood of Christ, the necessity of repentance in all men, because all men are guilty before God, these he supposes and builds on continually. “Let us stedfastly behold the blood of Christ, and see how precious it is in the sight of God, which being shed for our salvation, hath procured the grace of repentance for all the world.”

And the nature and necessity of lively faith, as a principle of all true goodness and happiness, and perfectly distinct from the dead historical assent, with which it is by many so unhappily confounded, is well illustrated in the case of Lot’s wife; “She had another spirit, another heart; hence she was made a monument of the Lord’s indignation, a pillar of salt to this day, that all the earth in all generations may know, that the double-minded, who stagger at the promises of God and distrust the power of grace in unbelief, shall obtain nothing of the Lord, but the signal display of his vengeance.”

The divine dignity and glory of our Saviour, is well described in these words: “Our Lord Jesus Christ

“the Sceptre of the Majesty of God, came not in the
 “pomp of arrogance or pride, though who can under-
 “stand the thunder of his power? But he was meek
 “and lowly.”

The doctrine of election runs remarkably through the Epistle, in connexion with holiness, as the scripture always states it. A passage may properly be quoted here, to shew that it was a primitive doctrine, and made use of for the promotion of an holy life. “Let us go to
 “him in sanctification of heart, lifting up holy hands to
 “him, influenced by the love of our gracious and com-
 “passionate Father, who hath made us by his election
 “his peculiar people. Since therefore we are the elect
 “of God, holy and beloved, let us work the works of
 “holiness.”

The distinguishing doctrine of christianity, without which indeed the gospel is a mere name, and incapable of consoling sinners, is doubtless justification by the grace of Christ through faith alone. See a testimony to it in this author. It deserves to be distinctly remembered, as an unequivocal testimony of the faith of the primitive church.

“All these (he is speaking of the Old Testament
 “fathers) were magnified and honoured, not through
 “themselves, not through their works, not through the
 “righteous deeds which they performed, but through
 “his will. And we also by his will being called in
 “Christ Jesus, are justified not by ourselves, nor by
 “our wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or by
 “the works which we have wrought in holiness of
 “heart, but by faith, by which the Almighty hath jus-
 “tified all who are or have been justified from the be-
 “ginning.”

His quick perception of the common objection, what need then of good works? His ready answer to it, and his manner of stating the necessity of good works, and of placing them on their proper basis, shew how deeply he had studied, and how exquisitely he felt St. Paul's doctrines. “But what then? Shall we neglect,
 “good works? Does it follow from hence, that we

“should leave the law of loving obedience? God forbid; let us rather hasten with all earnestness of mind to every good work; for the Lord himself rejoices in his works. Having such a pattern, how strenuously should we follow his will, and work the works of righteousness with all our might.”

The doctrine of the Spirit's work on the heart, and of the experience of his consolations in the soul, which in our days is so generally charged with enthusiasm, appears from the following passage :

“How blessed, how amazing the gifts of God, beloved! Life in immortality, splendor in righteousness, truth in liberty, faith in assurance, sobriety in holiness! And thus far in this life we know experimentally. If the earnestness of the Spirit be so precious, what must be the things which God hereafter hath prepared for them that wait for him?”

I forbear to quote his views of the resurrection, and his beautiful manner of supporting the doctrine by the analogy of nature, after the manner of St. Paul. His mistake in applying the story of the Arabian Phoenix, has been, I think, too severely censured. None in truth ought to censure it as a blemish, except those who can so much compliment their own sagacity, as to say, that they in like circumstances would not have done the same. Had the fact been true, it doubtless would have afforded an happy illustration of the doctrine of a resurrection. It was a story generally believed in his days. That Clement believed it, is no proof of weakness of judgment; it only shews, that the Epistle is not properly inspired.

What men are by nature, how dark and miserable, what by converting grace in the renewal of the understanding, is thus expressed :

“Through him, that is Jesus Christ, let us behold the glory of God shining in his face; through him the eyes of our hearts were opened; through him our understanding, dark and foolish as it was, rises again into his marvellous light; through him the Lord would have us to taste of immortal knowledge.”

This Epistle seems to come as near to apostolical simplicity, as any thing we have on record. The illustration of its spirit would shew this abundantly. It is difficult to do this by single passages. A temper so heavenly, meek, holy, charitable, patient, yet fervent, pious, and humble, runs through the whole. Take a sentence or two by way of specimen.

“Christ is their’s, who are poor in spirit, and lift not up themselves above the flock, but are content to be low in the church.”—“Let us obey our spiritual pastors, and honour our elders, and let the younger be disciplined in the fear of God. Let our wives be directed to what is good, to follow chastity, modesty, meekness, sincerity. Let them evidence their power of self-government by their silence, and let them shew love not in the spirit of a sect or party, but to all who fear God.” Again, “Let not the strong despise the weak, and let the weak reverence the strong. Let the rich communicate to the poor, and let the poor be thankful to God, for those through whom their wants are supplied. Let the wise exert his wisdom, not merely in words, but in good works. Let the humble prove his humility, not by testifying of himself how humble he is, but by a conduct, that may occasion others to give testimony to him; let not the chaste be proud of his chastity, knowing that from God he has received the gift of continency.” Have we not all one God, one Christ, one Spirit of grace poured upon us, and one calling in Christ? Why do we separate and distract the members of Christ, and fight against our own body, and are come to such an height of madness, as to forget that we are members one of another.”

“Is any among you strong in faith, mighty in knowledge, gifted in utterance, judicious in doctrines, and pure in conduct! The more he appears exalted above others, the more need has he to be poor in spirit, and take care, that he look not to his own things, but that he study to promote the common good of the church.”

“Every one, whose heart has any good degree of the fear and love, which is the result of our common hope, had rather that he himself be exposed to censure than his neighbours ; and had rather condemn himself, than break that beautiful bond of brotherly love, which is delivered to us.”

After pressing the beautiful example of the charity of Moses recorded in the book of Exodus,* he says, “Who of you has any generosity of sentiment, or bowels of compassion, or fulness of love ? Let him say, if the strife and schism be on my account, I will depart, wherever you please, and perform whatever the church shall require. Only let Christ’s flock live in peace with their settled pastors. Surely the Lord will smile on such a character.”

III. The reader will not expect that I should solicitously register the names, and record the opinions and acts of those, who are commonly called heretics. I have only to view them in one single light, as they deviated from the spirit of the gospel. Let us keep in view what it really is. The simple faith of Christ as the only Saviour of lost sinners, and the effectual influences of the Holy Ghost in recovering souls altogether depraved by sin, these are the leading ideas.

When the out-pouring of the Spirit began, these things were taught with power, and no sentiments which militated against them, could be supported for a moment. As, through the prevalence of human corruption and the crafts of Satan, the love of the truth was lessened, heresies and various abuses of the gospel appeared ; and in estimating them, we may form some idea of the declension toward the end of the century, which doubtless was not confined to the Jewish church, but appears in a measure to have affected the Gentiles also.

The epistolary part of the New Testament affords but too ample proof of corruptions. The apostle Paul guards the Romans against false teachers, one mark of

* Ex. xxxii.

whose character was, "that by good words and fair speeches they deceive the hearts of the simple."* Corinth was full of evils of this kind. There false apostles transformed themselves into the appearance of real ones. The Jewish evil of self-righteousness, which threatened the destruction of the Galatian church, has been distinctly considered. Many christians, so called, "walked as enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end was destruction, whose god was their belly, whose glory was in their shame, who minded earthly things."† So Paul tells the Philippians, and with tears of charity.

That amazing mass of austerities and superstitions, by which in after ages the purity of the faith was so clouded, and that self-righteousness which superseded men's regard to the mediation of Jesus, and the glory of divine grace, were beginning, even in the apostle's days, as the Epistle to the Colossians shews.

The prophecy of Antichrist, in the First Epistle of Timothy, chapter the fourth, expressly intimates, that its spirit had already commenced by the excessive valuation of celibacy and abstinence. And the corrupt mixtures of vain philosophy had already seduced some from the faith. Under the gradual increase of these evils, a meaner taste was formed, in several churches at least, who could even bear to admire such injudicious writers as Hermas and the pseudo Barnabas. *Peter, and Jude,† have graphically described some horrible enormities of nominal christians, little if at all inferior to the most scandalous eruptions of the same kind in these latter ages. The spirit of schism we have seen again breaking out in the church of Corinth. But let us observe more distinctly the heretical opinions of the first century.

Ecclesiastical historians, who have passed by the most glorious scenes of real christianity, have yet with minute accuracy given us the lists of heretics, subtilized by refined subdivisions without end. It seems more useful to observe them, as they stand contradistinguish-

* Rom. xvi.

† Philip. iii.

‡ 2 Pet.

§ Jude's Epistle

ed to that faith which was once delivered to the saints. Tertullian reduces the heresies in the apostolic times to two, the Docetæ and the Ebionites. Theodoret also gives the same account of them.

Of the instruments of Satan in these things, Simon, who had been rebuked by Peter in Samaria, was the most remarkable, the father of the Gnostics or Docetæ, and of a number of heretical opinions and practices of the first century. However obscure the history of Simon himself may be, the leading opinions of the Docetæ are obvious enough. They held, that the Son of God had no proper humanity, and that he died only in appearance on the cross. Cerinthus allowed him a real human nature, but supposed, that Christ, whom yet all the heretics looked on as properly inferior to the supreme God, descending from heaven, united himself to the man Jesus.

The Ebionites were not much different from the Cerinthians; they removed the appearance of mystery from the subject, for the most part looked on Jesus Christ as a mere man born of Mary and her husband, though a man of a most excellent character. Whoever thinks it needful to examine these things more nicely, may consult Irenæus. The account of Ebion is in Eusebius, short, but sufficiently clear.

It is not to be wondered at, that with such low ideas of the Redeemer's person, the Ebionites denied the virtue of his atoning blood, and laboured to establish justification by the works of the law. Their rejection of the divine authority of St. Paul's Epistles, and accusation of him as an Antinomian, naturally arise from their system. Tertullian tells us, that this was a Jewish sect; and their observance of Jewish rites demonstrates that he is right in the observation.

These two heretical schemes, the one opposing the humanity of Christ, the other annihilating the divinity, were the inventions of men leaning to their own understandings, and unwilling to admit the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. The primitive christians held, that the Redeemer was both

God and man, equally possessed of the real properties of both natures, and no man, willing to take his creed from the New Testament, ever thought otherwise ; the proofs of both natures in one person, Christ Jesus, being pretty equally diffused through the sacred books. One verse in the ninth chapter to the Romans, the fifth, expressing both, would confound all the critical powers of heretics, and therefore forces them, on the slightest grounds, to have recourse to their usual method of suspecting the soundness of the sacred text. The only difficulty in this subject is, for man to be brought to believe on divine authority, that doctrine, the grounds of which he cannot comprehend. Though we have just as good reason to doubt the union of soul and body in man, from our equal ignorance of the bond of that union, yet proud men, unacquainted with that internal misery and depravity of our nature, which renders a complete character like that of Christ, so divinely suitable to their wants, and so exactly proper to mediate between God and man, were soon willing to oppose the doctrine of the incarnation of Jesus ; and as there were two ways of doing this, by taking away one or other of the two natures, we see at once the origin of the two sects before us. And the doctrine of the atonement was opposed by both, by the Docetæ, in their denial of the real human nature of Jesus, and by the Ebionites, in their denial of the divine nature, which stamps an infinite value on his sufferings.

Such were the perversions of the doctrines of the incarnation and atonement of the Son of God. Nor did the doctrine of justification by faith only, which St. Paul had so strenuously supported, escape a similar treatment. In all ages it has been either fiercely opposed, or basely abused. The Epistle to the Galatians describes the former, Jude's Epistle the latter. And the memoirs of these heretics, short and imperfect as they are, inform us of some who professed an extraordinary degree of sanctity, to be abstracted altogether from the flesh, and to live in excessive abstemiousness. Others again, as if to support their christian liberty,

lived in sin with greediness, and indulged themselves in all the gratifications of sensuality. Mankind need indeed a spiritual illumination and direction, to improve the grace of the gospel to the real interests of holiness. At this day there are those, who think that the renunciation of all our own works in point of dependance must be the destruction of holiness, and are thence led to seek salvation by the works of the law ; while others, admitting in words the grace of Jesus Christ, encourage themselves in sin. A truly humbled frame, and a clear insight into the beauty of holiness, through the effectual influence of the Divine Spirit, will teach men to live by the faith of Jesus. The Gentile converts, by the Gnostic heresy, and the Jewish, by that of Ebion, were considerably corrupted toward the close of the century. The latter indeed of these heresies had been raising itself gradually for some time. We have seen, that the object of the first council of Jerusalem was to guard men against the imposition of Mosaic observances, and to teach them to rely on the grace of Christ alone for salvation. But self-righteousness is a weed of too quick a growth to be easily eradicated. The Pharisaic christians, we may apprehend, were not immediately advanced to the full size of heresy. But when they proceeded to reject St. Paul's writings, we may fairly conclude, that they fully rejected the article of justification. A separation was made, and the Ebionites, as a distinct body of men, deserved the name of heretics.

St. Paul indeed, who had with an eagle's eye explored the growing evil, was now no more in the world. But the Head of the church prolonged the life of his favourite John to the extreme age of an hundred ; and his authority checked the progress of heretical pravity. He resided much at Ephesus, where Paul had declared, that grievous wolves would make their appearance. Jerom says, that he wrote his gospel at the desire of the bishops of Asia, against Cerinthus and Ebion. Indeed such expressions as these, "the passover, a feast of the Jews ;" and "that Sabbath day was an high day," seem to indicate, that the Jewish polity was

now no more, it not being natural to give such explanations of customs, except to those, who had no opportunity of ocular inspection. I cannot but think, that Dr. Lardner in his attempts to shew, that St. John in his gospel had no intention to oppose any particular heresies, has betrayed his own predilection for Socinianism.* In an affair merely historical, I know none whose judgment and industry deserve more regard. But he is an enemy of the vital doctrines of the gospel, though as candid an one as his principles would permit. In truth, there are various internal proofs which corroborate the testimony of Jerom. The very beginning of his gospel is an authoritative declaration of the proper deity of Jesus Christ. The attentive reader cannot but recollect various discourses to the same purport. The confession of Thomas, after his resurrection, stands single in St. John's gospel. The particular pains which he takes to assure us of the real death of his Master, and of the issuing of real blood and water from his wounded side, are delivered with an air of one zealous to obviate the error of the Docetæ. Nor can I understand his laying so great a stress on Jesus Christ's coming in the flesh† in any other manner.

While this apostle lived, the heretics were much discountenanced. And it is certain that Gnostics and Ebionites were always looked on as perfectly distinct from the christian church. There needs no more evidence to prove this, than their arrangement by Irenæus and Eusebius under heretical parties. Doubtless they called themselves christians, and so do all heretics, for obvious reasons; and, for reasons as obvious, all who are tender of the fundamentals of the gospel should not own their right to the appellation. A remark or two may be made before we dismiss them.

1. It does not appear by any evidence that I can find, that these men were persecuted for their religion. Retaining the christian name, and yet glorifying man's

* See his Supplement to the Credibility in the History of St. John.

† 1 John iv.

righteousness, wisdom, and strength, "they spake of "the world, and the world heard them." The apostle John, in saying this, has his eye on the Docetæ particularly. In our own times persons of the same stamp would willingly ingratiate themselves with real christians, and yet at the same time avoid the cross of Christ, and whatever would expose them to the enmity of the world. We have even the testimony of Justin Martyr, that Simon was honoured in the Pagan world, even to idolatry.* What stress is laid on this circumstance in the New Testament, as an evidence of the characters of men in religion, is well known.

2. If it be made an objection against evangelical principles, that numbers who profess them have run into a variety of abuses, perversions, and contentions, we have seen enough, even in the first century, of the same kind of evils to convince us, that such objections militate not against divine truth, but might have been made with equal force against the apostolical age.

3. A singular change in one respect has taken place in the christian world. The two heretical parties above described, were not much unlike the Arians and Socinians at this day. The former have the same ideas as the Docetæ radically, though it would be unjust to accuse them of the Antinomian abominations, which defiled the followers of Simon; the latter are the very counterpart of the Ebionites. The Trinitarians were then the body of the church; and so much superior was their influence and numbers, that the other two were treated as heretics. At present the two parties, who agree in lessening the dignity of Christ, though in an unequal manner, are carrying on a vigorous controversy against one another, while the Trinitarians are despised by both as unworthy the notice of men of reason and letters. Yet I shall beg leave to insist on the necessity of our understanding certain fundamental principles, as necessary to constitute the real gospel. The divinity of Christ, the atonement, justification by

* Apud. Euseb. B. 2. E. H.

faith, regeneration—we have seen these to be the principles of the primitive church, and within this inclosure the whole of that piety which produced such glorious effects has been confined, and it is worthy the attention of learned men to consider whether the same remark may not be made in all ages.

IV. Thus have we seen the most astonishing revolution in the human mind and in human manners, that was ever seen in any age, effected without any human power, legal or illegal, and even against the united opposition of all the powers then in the world; and this too not in countries rude or uncivilized, but in the most humanized, the most learned, and the most polished part of the globe, within the Roman empire; no part of which was exempted from a sensible share in its effects. This empire, within the first century at least, seems to have been the proper limit of christian conquests.*

If an infidel or skeptic can produce any thing like this effected by other religions, he may with some plausibility compare mahometanism or any other human religion with christianity. But as the gospel stands unrivalled in its manner of subduing the minds of men, the argument for its divinity, from its propagation in the world, will remain invincible.

And surely every dispassionate observer must confess, that the change was from bad to good. No man will venture to say, that the religious and moral principles of Jews and Gentiles, before their conversion to christianity, were good. The idolatries, abominations, and ferocity of the Gentile world will be allowed to have been not less than they are described in the first chapter to the Romans; and the writings of Horace and Juvenal will

* Indeed that France had any share in the blessings of the gospel within this century, can only be inferred from the knowledge we have, that it was introduced into Spain. Whether our own country was evangelized at all in this century, is very doubtful. Nor can we be certain that any ministers as yet had passed into Africa. The assertion therefore that the gospel had spread through the Roman empire, must be understood with a few exceptions, though I think scarce any more than these which have been mentioned.

prove, that the picture is not exaggerated. The extreme wickedness of the Jews is graphically delineated by their own historian, and is not denied by any. What but the influence of God, and an out-pouring of his Holy Spirit (the first of the kind since the coming of Christ, and the measure and standard for regulating our views of all succeeding ones) can account for such a change? From the Acts of the Apostles and their Epistles, I have drawn the greatest part of the narrative; but the little that has been added from other sources is not heterogeneous. Here are thousands of men turned from all wickedness to all goodness, many very suddenly, or at least in a short space of time, reformed in understanding, in inclination, in affection; knowing, loving, and confiding in God; from a state of mere selfishness converted into the purest philanthropists; living only to please God, and to exercise kindness toward one another; and all of them, recovering really, what philosophy only pretended to, the dominion of reason over passion, unfeignedly subject to their Maker, rejoicing in his favour amidst the severest sufferings, and serenely waiting for their dismissal into a land of blissful immortality. That all this must be of God, is demonstrative: but the inference which follows of the divine authority of Christ, and of the wickedness and danger of despising or even neglecting him, is not always attended to by those who are most concerned in it.

But the christian church was not yet in possession of any external dignity or political importance. No one nation as yet was christian, though thousands of individuals were so, but those chiefly of the middling and lower ranks. The modern improvements of civil society have taught men however, that these are the strength of a nation and that whatever is praise-worthy is far more commonly diffused among them, than among the noble and great. In the present age then it should be no disparagement to the character of the first christians, that the church was chiefly composed of persons too low in life, to be of any weight in the despotic system of gov-

ernment which then prevailed. We have seen two persons of the imperial family,* and one of uncommon genius and endowments,† but scarce any more of the same sort, connected with christianity. We should not then be surprised, that christians are so little noticed by Tacitus and Josephus, intent only as they were on sub-lunary politics, and scarce deigning to think of any as existing in an individual capacity. Nor is this itself a small exemplification of the genius of this religion, destined to form men for the next life, and not for this.

In doctrine they all worshipped the one living and true God, who made himself known to them in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; each of these they were taught to worship by the very office of baptism performed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And the whole economy of grace so constantly reminded them of their obligations to the Father who chose them to salvation, to the Saviour who died for them, and to the Comforter who supported and sanctified them, and was so closely connected with their experience and practice, that they were perpetually incited to worship the Divine Three in One. They all agreed in feeling conviction of sin, of helplessness, of a state of perdition; in relying on the atoning blood, perfect righteousness, and prevalent intercession of Jesus, as their only hope of heaven. Regeneration by the Holy Ghost was their common privilege, and without his constant influence they owned themselves obnoxious only to sin and vanity. Their community of goods, and their love-feasts,‡ though discontinued at length, probably because found impracticable, demonstrated their superlative charity and heavenly-mindedness. Yet a gloomy cloud hung over the conclusion of the century.

The first impressions made by the out-pouring of the Spirit are generally the strongest and the most decisively distinct from the spirit of the world. But human depravity, overborne for a time, rises afresh, particularly in the next generation. Hence the disorders of schism

* Clemens and Domitilla. † St. Paul. ‡ See Jude's Epistle.

and heresy. Their tendency is to destroy the pure work of God. The first christians, with the purest charity to the persons of heretics, gave their errors no quarter, and discountenanced them by every reasonable method.

The heretics, on the contrary, endeavoured to unite themselves with christians. If the same methods be at this day continued, if the heretic endeavour to promote his false religion by pretended charity, and the christian stand aloof from him, without dreading the charge of bigotry, each act in character, as their predecessors did. The heretics by weakening men's attachment to Christ, and the schismatics by promoting a worldly and uncharitable spirit, each did considerable mischief; but it was the less because christians carefully kept themselves distinct from the heretical, and thus set limits to the infection.

It has been of unspeakable detriment to the christian religion, to conceive that all who profess it, are believers of it, properly speaking. Whereas very many are christians in name only, never attending to the nature of the gospel at all. Not a few glory in sentiments subversive of its genius and spirit. And there are still more who go not so far in opposition to godliness, yet by making light of the whole work of grace on the heart, they are as plainly void of christianity. We have seen the first christians individually converted; and as human nature needs the same change still, the particular instances of conversion described in the Acts are models for us at this day. National conversions were then unknown, nor has the term any proper meaning. But when ideas of christians by wholesale grow fashionable, opposites are mixed, the form of the gospel stands, and its power is denied. But let us not anticipate; these scenes appeared not in the first century.

CENTURY II.

CHAPTER I.

The History of Christians during the Reign of Trajan.

THE master of the Roman world in the beginning of this century was the renowned Trajan. His predecessor Nerva had restored the christian exiles, and granted a full toleration to the church. Hence the last of the apostles had recovered his station at Ephesus, and slept in the Lord, before the short interval of tranquillity was closed by the persecuting spirit of Trajan. Whatever account may be given or conjectured of the cause of his dislike of christians, he had a confirmed prejudice against them, and meditated the extinction of the name; nor does it appear that he ever changed his sentiments, or retracted his edicts against them.

There is an account of his persecution in his correspondence with Pliny the governor of Bithynia, a man well known in classical history. The two Epistles between the master and the servant deserve to be transcribed at length;* they seem to have been written in 106 or 107.

C. Pliny to Trajan Emperor health.

“ It is my usual custom, Sir, to refer all things, of which I harbour any doubts, to you. For who can better direct my judgment in its hesitation, or instruct my understanding in its ignorance? I never had the fortune to be present at any examination of christians, before I came into this province. I am therefore at a loss, to determine what is the usual object either of

* Pliny's Epistles, x. 97, 98.

“inquiry or of punishment, and to what length either
“of them is to be carried. It has also been with me a
“question very problematical, whether any distinction
“should be made between the young and the old, the
“tender and the robust; whether any room should be
“given for repentance, or the guilt of christianity once
“incurred is not to be expiated by the most unequivocal
“retractation; whether the name itself, abstracted from
“any flagitiousness of conduct, or the crimes connected
“with the name, be the object of punishment. In the
“mean time this has been my method, with respect to
“those, who were brought before me as christians. I
“asked them whether they were christians; if they
“pleaded guilty, I interrogated them twice afresh, with
“a menace of capital punishment. In case of obstinate
“perseverance, I ordered them to be executed. For of
“this I had no doubt, whatever was the nature of their
“religion, that a sullen and obstinate inflexibility called
“for the vengeance of the magistrate. Some there were
“infected with the same madness, whom, on account of
“their privilege of citizenship, I reserved to be sent to
“Rome, to be referred to your tribunal. In the course
“of this business, informations pouring in, as is usual
“when they are encouraged, more cases occurred. An
“anonymous libel was exhibited, with a catalogue of
“names of persons, who yet declared, that they were not
“christians then, or ever had been, and repeated after
“me an invocation of the gods and of your image, which
“for this purpose I had ordered to be brought with the
“images of the deities, performed sacred rites with wine
“and frankincense, and execrated Christ, none of which
“things I am told a real christian can ever be compelled
“to do. On this account I dismissed them. Others,
“named by an informer, first affirmed and then denied
“the charge of christianity; declaring that they had
“been christians, but had desisted some three years
“ago, others still longer, some even twenty years ago.
“All of them worshipped your image, and the statues
“of the gods, and also execrated Christ. And this was
“the account which they gave me of the nature of the

“religion they once had professed, whether it deserves the
 “name of crime or error, that they were accustomed on a
 “stated day to meet before day-light, and to repeat among
 “themselves an hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind
 “themselves by an oath with an obligation of not com-
 “mitting any wickedness, but on the contrary of ab-
 “staining from thefts, robberies, and adulteries, also of
 “not violating their promise, or denying a pledge, after
 “which it was their custom to separate, and to meet again
 “at a promiscuous, harmless meal, from which last they
 “yet desisted, after the publication of my edict, in which,
 “agreeably to your orders, I forbade any societies. On
 “which account I judged it the more necessary, to in-
 “quire by torture from two females, who were said to
 “be deaconesses, what is the real truth. But nothing
 “could I collect, except a depraved and excessive
 “superstition. Deferring therefore any farther in-
 “vestigation, I determined to consult you. For the
 “number of culprits is so great, as to call for serious con-
 “sultation. For many are informed against of every
 “age and of both sexes, and more still will be in the same
 “situation. For the contagion of the superstition hath
 “spread not only through cities, but even villages and
 “the country. Not that I think it impossible to check
 “and to correct it. The success of my endeavours
 “hitherto forbids such desponding thoughts; for the
 “temples, once almost desolate, begin to be frequented,
 “and the sacred solemnities, which had long been inter-
 “mitted, are now attended afresh; and the sacrificial
 “victims are now sold every where, which once could
 “scarce find a purchaser. Whence I conclude, that
 “many might be reclaimed, were the hope of impunity
 “on repentance absolutely confirmed.”

Trajan to Pliny.

“You have done perfectly right, my dear Pliny, in
 “the inquiry which you have made concerning chris-
 “tians. For truly no one general rule can be laid
 “down, which will apply itself to all cases. They

“ must not be sought after. If they are brought before
 “ you and convicted, let them be capitally punished, yet
 “ with this restriction, that if any renounce christianity,
 “ and evidence his sincerity by supplicating our gods,
 “ however suspected he may be for the past, he shall
 “ obtain pardon for the future, on his repentance. But
 “ anonymous libels in no case ought to be attended to ;
 “ for the precedent would be of the worst sort, and per-
 “ fectly incongruous to the maxims of my government.”

The moral character of Pliny is one of the most amiable in all Pagan antiquity ; yet does it appear, that he joined with his master Trajan in his hatred of christians. In the course of this history many instances of the same kind will occur. Trajan’s character is doubtless much inferior, illustrious indeed by reason of great talents, and great exploits, but by the testimony of Dio, Spartian, and Julian, stained with flagrant vice,* and, as is generally confessed, tarnished by an extravagant ambition. But how is it to be accounted for, that men, who seem enamoured with the beauty of virtue, should turn from it with perfect disgust, and even persecute it with rancour, when it appears in the most genuine colours ? Let those who imagine such men as Pliny to be good and virtuous in the proper sense of the words, try to solve this phenomenon on their principles. On those of the real gospel, the question is not hard to be determined. Admitting that Pliny might at first be prejudiced against christians from misrepresentation, how happens it, that he continues so after better information, even when he is convinced, that no moral evil is to be found in the christians of Bithynia, that their meetings are peaceable, and the ends aimed at by them, not only innocent, but laudable ? The truth is, virtue in Pliny’s writings, and virtue in St. Paul’s, means not the same thing. For humility, the basis of a christian’s virtue, the Pagan has not even a name in his language. The glory of God is the end of virtue in the one, his own glory is the end of virtue in the

* See Lardner’s Collection, v. ii. c. 9.

other. The christians of Bithynia would be able to give the severe inquisitor "a reason of the hope that "was in them with meekness and fear," and then suffering according to the will of God, to commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as to a faithful Creator. These and other precious sentiments in St. Peter's First Epistle, which was addressed to some of their fathers, possibly to some of them then alive, would now be remembered by them with peculiar force. A vain-glorious mind like Pliny's, elated with conscious rectitude, would scorn to hear of being saved by the atoning blood of Jesus, would not believe the representation of human nature which they would give him, and would prefer his reason before the Holy Ghost. Had he been, like Cicero, deeply tinged with the academical philosophy of Greece, like him he would have gloried in skeptical ambiguity, or have inclined to the atheistic views, to which most of the old philosophers were devoted. But as he seems to have imitated him, rather in his passion for oratorical glory, than in his philosophical spirit, he rested in the vulgar creed, highly absurd as it was, and preferred it to the purest dictates of christianity. The former thwarted not his pride and his lusts; the latter required the humiliation of the one, and the mortification of the other.

We see here the true reason of the enmity of men of amiable morals, who are destitute of holiness, in all ages, against the gospel. Were enmity capable of being abated by argument, Pliny might have seen the iniquity of his proceedings. To call a thing madness and depraved superstition, on the face of which he sees much good, and no evil, is the height of unreasonableness. But it is practised by many at this day who call themselves christians, but are really as averse to the gospel as Pliny was; and if we would not be deceived by mere names, but would enter into the spirit of things, who they are that resemble Pliny, and who they are that resemble the christians of Bithynia, would not be difficult to understand.

In fact, as there are now, so there were then, persons who worshipped Christ as their God, who loved one another as brethren united in him; men who derived from his influence support under the severest pressures, calumniated by others, treated as silly people, on account of that humble and self-denying spirit, by which they kept up communion with their Saviour on earth, and expected to enjoy him in heaven. It was not the fault of Trajan and Pliny, that such principles were not exterminated from the earth. They hated the men, their religion still more.

The difference between the persecutors and the sufferers is remarkable with respect to the spirit of politics. The religion of Trajan was governed by this. And his servant thinks it needful to force men to follow *his* religion, whether they believed it to be right or not. Persecuting edicts appear to have been in force against christians before the correspondence which we have seen, and Nerva's toleration seems to have ceased. But the christians shewed, that their Master's kingdom was not of this world. They were meek and passive, as Christ himself had been, and as Peter had exhorted them to be. Their number was very large in Bithynia, capable surely of raising a rebellion troublesome to the state; and they would have done so, had their spirits been as turbulent as those of many pretended christians, "But they were subject not only for wrath, but also 'for conscience' sake." Had there been the least suspicion of a seditious spirit among them, Pliny must have mentioned it; and their discontinuance of their feasts of charity, after they found them disagreeable to government, is a proof of their loyal and peaceable temper.

In Asia, Arrius Antoninus persecuted with extreme fury. I am not certain whether his persecution belongs to the reign of Trajan; but as there was an Antoninus very intimate with Pliny, the story told of him by Tertullian,* may as well be introduced here as any where else.

* Ad Scapul. C. uti.

The whole body of christians wearied with constant hardships, presented themselves before his tribunal. He ordered a few of them to execution, and said to the rest, "Miserable people, if you choose death, you may find precipices and halters enough." I am willing to believe, that the christians meant to disarm the persecutor by the sight of their numbers.

One of the most venerable characters at this time was Simeon, bishop of Jerusalem, the successor of St. James. Jerusalem indeed was no more, but the church still existed in some part of Judea. Some heretics accused him as a christian before Atticus the Roman governor. He was then an hundred and twenty years old, and was scourged many days. The persecutor was astonished at his hardiness, not moved with pity for his sufferings; at last he ordered him to be crucified.*

It was in the year 107, that Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, was martyred for the faith of Jesus. On the death of Euodius, about the year 70, he had been appointed in his room by the apostles, who were then alive. He governed the church during this long period. Nor was it a small indication of the continued grace of God to that city, to have been blessed so long with such a luminary. We must be content with the short character given of his ministry in the Acts of Ignatius, a piece of martyrology first published by archbishop Usher, from two old manuscripts in 1647, and carrying in it stronger marks of credibility than is usual with such compositions.

"He was a man in all things like to the apostles: as
 "a good governor, by the helm of prayer and fasting,
 "by the constancy of his doctrine and spiritual labour,
 "he opposed himself to the floods of the adversary; he
 "was like a divine lamp illuminating the hearts of the
 "faithful by his exposition of the Holy Scriptures;
 "and lastly, to preserve his church, he scrupled not
 "freely to expose himself to a bitter death." These Acts were compiled by those who went with him

* Euseb. B. iii. c. 29.

from Antioch and were eye witnesses of his sufferings.*

Ambition and the lust of power were not stronger features in the character of Cæsar, than the desire of martyrdom was in that of Ignatius. Divine providence however preserved him for the benefit of the church during the persecution of Domitian, and reserved him to the time of Trajan. This prince being come to Antioch about the tenth year of his reign, in the year 107, in his way to the Parthian war, Ignatius, fearing for the christians, and hoping to avert the storm by offering himself to suffer in their stead, came voluntarily into the presence of Trajan. I shall deliver the conference, as it stands in the Acts, a monument of false glory shrouding itself under superstition and ignorance on the one hand, and of true glory, supported by the faith and hope of Jesus, on the other.

Being come into the emperor's presence, he was thus addressed by Trajan.† What an impious wretch art thou, both to transgress our commands, and to inveigle other souls into the same folly to their ruin? Ignatius answered, Theophorus ought not to be called so; for wicked spirits are departed from the servants of God. But if you call me impious because of my hostility, I own the charge in that respect. For I dissolve all their snares, sustained inwardly by Christ the heavenly King. Traj. Pray who is Theophorus? Ign. He who has Christ in his breast. Traj. And thinkest thou not that gods reside in us also, who fight for us against our enemies? Ing. You mistake in calling the demons of the nations by the name of gods. For there is only one God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; and one Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, whose kingdom be my portion. Traj. His kingdom do you say, who was crucified under Pilate? Ign. His, who crucified my sin with its author, and has put all the fraud and mal-

* Wake's Epistles.

† See the Acts of Ignatius, and the preface of the Life of Ignatius prefixed to an excellent tragedy written by Mr. Gambold, which represents the spirit of primitive christianity.

ice of Satan under their feet, who carry him in their heart. Traj. Dost thou then carry him who was crucified within thee? Ign. I do; for it is written; "I will dwell in them and walk in them." Then Trajan pronounced this sentence against him, "Since Ignatius confesses, that he carries within himself him that was crucified, we command, that he be carried bound by soldiers to great Rome, there to be thrown to the beasts for the entertainment of the people."

The great Scaliger was puzzled to conceive what could induce Trajan to order his being sent so long a journey for execution. It might seem more natural for him to have ordered him to suffer in the view of his own flock, in order to deter them from christianity. But Trajan might think the example much more striking and extensive, by using the method which he took. At any rate providence undoubtedly displayed the honours of the cross much more copiously by this means, as will appear by what follows. The doctrine of union with Christ by faith, now so much ridiculed, appears here in its full glory. And if ever we be called to scenes like these, we shall feel the need of it strongly, and be sensible of the impotence of those schemes of mere moral virtue, which are now substituted in its room. Christ within can alone support the heart in the hour of severe trial.

The scene before us is august: the state of christendom at that time is much illustrated by it. The seven Epistles of this great man, undoubtedly genuine as they are, and accurately distinguished from all corrupt interpolations,* will come in aid to the acts of his martyrdom; by them he being dead, yet speaketh; and what the gospel can do for men, who really believe it, and feel the energy of the Spirit of its divine Author, has not often been more illustriously displayed.

From Antioch he was hurried by his guards to Se-leucia; sailing from thence, after great fatigue he arriv-

* Archbishop Usher has preserved, or rather restored, these Epistles to us.

ed at Smyrna. While the ship remained in port, he was allowed the pleasure of visiting Polycarp, who was bishop of the christians there. They had been fellow-disciples of St. John; and the holy joy of their interview may be conceived by those, who know what the love of Christ is, and how it operates in the breasts of those in whom he dwells. Deputies were sent from the various churches of Asia to attend and console him, and to receive some benefit by his spiritual communications. Bishops, presbyters, and deacons conversed with him; a general convocation of the churches seems to have taken place. From hence he sent letters to the churches. Four of the seven were written from Smyrna, those to the churches of Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, and Rome.

The church of Ephesus appears, from his Epistle to them, still to have maintained its character of evangelical purity. And from the account which he gives of them, their zeal, in which they had decayed, was revived; and the rage of persecution was the hot-bed, which reanimated their souls, and made them fruitful again in faith, hope, and charity. The very titles by which he addresses them demonstrate what their faith was in common with that of the whole church at that time, and abundantly shew the vanity of those, whose dislike of the peculiar truths of christianity induces them to suppose, that the ideas of predestination, election, and grace, were purely systematic inventions of Augustin, and unknown to the primitive christians. We are certain, that St. Paul's Epistles, and that particularly addressed to this church, are full of the same things.

“Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the
 “worthily happy church in Ephesus of Asia, blessed in
 “the majesty and fulness of God the Father, predesti-
 “nated before the world to be perpetually permanent
 “in glory, immoveable, united, and elect in the gen-
 “uine suffering,* by the will of the Father, and of Je-

* Alluding doubtless to the errors of the Docetæ.

“sus Christ our God, much joy in Jesus Christ
 “and in his spotless grace.” The character he
 gives of their bishop Onesimus raises our idea
 of him to a great degree. He calls him “inex-
 “pressible in charity, whom I beseech you to love
 “according to Jesus Christ, and all of you to imitate
 “him. Blessed be his name, who has counted
 “you worthy to enjoy such a bishop.” With him
 he honourably mentions also some presbyters or
 deacons of their church, “in whom,” says he, “I
 “have seen you all in love.” Onesimus probably
 was the fugitive slave of Philemon, a growing plant in
 St. Paul’s time.

The unaffected charity and humility of Ignatius de-
 serve our attention. He alone seemed unconscious
 of his attainments, while the whole christian world
 admired him. “I do not,” says he, “dictate to you,
 “as if I were a person of any consequence. For
 “though I am bound for the name of Christ, I am not
 “yet perfected in Christ Jesus. For now I begin to
 “be a disciple, and speak to you as my teachers. For
 “I ought to be sustained by you in faith, in admoni-
 “tion, in patience, in long suffering. But since char-
 “ity will not suffer me to be silent concerning you, for
 “this reason I take upon me to exhort you to run to-
 “gether with me according to the mind of God.”

Nothing lies more on his heart in all his Epistles,
 than to recommend the most perfect union of the mem-
 bers of the church, and to reprobate schisms and dis-
 sensions. He conceives of them as all united to Jesus
 Christ, all partaking of the same spiritual life. To
 separate from the church, and to lose that subordination
 in which they all stood to their pastors, was to tear in
 pieces the body of Christ, and to expose themselves
 to the seductions of those, who would draw them from
 the faith and hope of the gospel. In modern times this
 language is judged not very consonant to the spirit of
 liberty, on which we are so apt to felicitate ourselves.
 And I am persuaded, that the strong manner, in which
 submission to the bishop is inculcated, has been the

strongest argument, with many, to encourage themselves in doubts of the authenticity of these pieces. But to doubt the genuineness of these Epistles on this account, is to be the slaves of prejudice. Usher, and after him Vossius, have sufficiently distinguished the genuine from the false and the interpolated; and the testimony of antiquity, and the agreement of the Epistles, as thus purified, with the quotations of the ancients, render them superior to all exceptions.*

The circumstances in which the churches were, sufficiently justify the strong expressions of Ignatius. Heretics of various kinds abounded; their specious artifices were likely to seduce the minds of the weak. What then could be so just a preservative to them, as to stick to the society of their faithful pastors, the successors of the apostles? Humility is the guard of real christian goodness; nothing but the want of it could tempt them to desire a separation. And in every age the same conduct toward godly pastors is doubtless the true wisdom of the church; and the spirit of schism, ambition, and self-conceit, disguising itself under the specious pretences of liberty and of conscience, has produced the most fatal effects. Ignatius certainly would not have wished the Ephesians to follow unsound and unfaithful pastors; but much more caution in judging, and a much greater degree of submission to ministers confessedly upright, are doubtless requisite, than most in our days are willing to admit. "Let no one mistake; if any man is not within the altar, he is deprived of the bread of God. If the prayer of one or two has so much strength, how much more that of the bishop and the whole church? He who separates from it is proud, and condemns himself. For it is written, God resisteth the proud. Let us study therefore obedience to the bishop, that we may be subject to God. And the more silent and

* I shall not enter into so large a field of criticism; whoever has leisure and temper sufficient for the subject, may read with advantage Dupin's statement of the controversy concerning Ignatius' Epistles, and may thence, I believe, learn all that is needful to be known concerning it

“gentle any one observes the bishop to be, the more on that account should he reverence him. For every one, to whom the master commits the stewardship, ought to be received as the master himself.”—“Indeed,” says he, “Onesimus exceedingly commends your godly order, that you all live according to truth, and that no heresy dwells with you”—“Some are accustomed to carry about a specious, but fallacious name, whose works are unworthy of God, whom you ought to avoid as wild beasts. For they are raging dogs, biting in secret, whom you should shun, as being persons very difficult to be cured. One physician there is bodily and spiritual, begotten and unbegotten, God appearing in flesh, in immortal true life, both from Mary and from God, first suffering, then impassible.”—“I have known some passing from hence,* whom you did not suffer to sow among you, stopping your ears; so that you would not receive their seed, as being stones of the temple of your Father, prepared for the building of God the Father, lifted up into heavenly places by the engine of Jesus Christ, which is his cross, using the Holy Spirit as a cord.”—“Yet pray also for other men without ceasing; for there is hope of conversion in them, that they also may be brought to God. Give them an opportunity to be instructed at least by your works.”—“Without Christ think nothing becoming, in whom I carry about my bonds, spiritual jewels, in which may I be found at the resurrection through your prayer, that my lot may be cast among the Ephesian christians, who have always harmonized with the apostles in the power of Jesus Christ.”

“Ye are partakers of the mysteries with Paul the holy, the renowned, the blessed, whose footsteps may I follow.” “Frequent assemblies for thanksgiving and prayer. For when you assiduously attend on these things, the powers of Satan are demolished, and

* From Smyrna, I suppose, where the heresy of the Docetæ was more common.

“his pernicious kingdom is dissolved by the unanimity
 “of your faith.”—“Remember me, as Jesus Christ
 “also does you. Pray for the church in Syria, whence
 “I am led bound to Rome, the meanest of the faithful
 “who are there.”

I know not how the reader may conceive; but to my mind, under all the disadvantages of a style bloated with Asiatic tumour, and still more perhaps of a text very corrupt, the ideas I have quoted (and indeed the greatest part of the Epistle is little inferior) while they represent partly the faith, discipline, and spirit of the Ephesian church, and partly the charitable and heavenly mind of Ignatius, give the fairest pattern of real christianity, alive in its root and in its fruits. We see here, what christians once were, and what the doctrines of divine grace are. And that happy union, order, and peace, which flourished so long at Ephesus, untainted with heresy, and ever preserving the simplicity of reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ, calls for our commendation of their obedience to their faithful pastors, the want of conscientiousness in which matter, so soon dissipates the spirit of the gospel in many modern churches, and whilst it feeds the pride of corrupt nature, reduces them into contemptible little parties, at variance with one another, and leaves them an easy prey to the crafty and designing.

The letters of Ignatius add something to the stock of history, as they introduce to our acquaintance the two Asiatic churches of Magnesia and Tralles, which else had been unknown to us. In truth, that whole fertile region of Asia Propria seems to have been more thoroughly evangelized than any other part of the world at that time. From the time of St. Paul's labours at Ephesus, “when all they which dwelt in Asia heard the
 “word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks,”* to the martyrdom of Ignatius, that is for half a century or upwards, the truth as it is in Jesus was preserved in its purity in these churches; the opposers of the gospel

* Acts xix. 10.

could gain no footing at all in some of them, in others made no great, or at least, no abiding impressions; in some the fervour of piety was much declined, in others it still retained a considerable strength. A strong sense of the infinite value of Jesus in his godhead, his priesthood, and his blood, prevailed in this region; faith and love were fed by the view of the Saviour; and patience in suffering for his name was one of their most common virtues.

Damas, the bishop of Magnesia, appears to have been a young person, whom Ignatius calls "worthy of God." Eminent grace in persons of tender years was sometimes in the primitive church distinguished by being raised to the episcopacy. In his letter to the Magnesians he warns them not to despise his youth, but to imitate the holy presbyters, who gave place to him, but not to him so properly, as to the Father of Jesus Christ.— "Some indeed call a man a bishop, but do every thing independently of him. Such seem to me to have lost a good conscience, because their assemblies are not regulated with stedfastness and christian order." He mentions also with honour Bassus and Apollonius as presbyters, and Sotio the deacon, "whose happiness," says he, "may I partake of, because he is subject to the bishop, as to the grace of God, and to the presbytery, as to the law of Jesus Christ."

Here, as elsewhere, he evidently points out three distinct ranks in the primitive church, the bishop, the presbyters, and the deacons. A blind and implicit submission to an hierarchy, however worthless and ignorant was then unknown. But a just and regular subordination, according to the ranks of men in the church, was then much attended to; and nothing like it, humanly speaking, so much encourages and enables godly pastors to discharge their office with zeal and alacrity. Nor is it difficult to conceive, what was the most customary mode of church government in those times. In vain, I think, will almost any modern church whatever set up any claim to resemblance. Usher's model of reduced episcopacy seems to come the nearest to the plan of primitive churches. At first indeed, or for some

time, at least in some instances, church governors were only of two ranks, presbyters and deacons. This seems to have been the case of Philippi* and of Ephesus,† and the term bishop was confounded with that of presbyter. The church of Corinth continued long in this state, so far as one may judge by Clement's Epistle; and thence we may in part account for the continuance of their contentious spirit. As these churches grew numerous, they could never be all assembled in one place; the presbyters must have ministered to different congregations, though the church continued one. Toward the end of the first century all the churches followed the model of the mother-church of Jerusalem, where one of the apostles was the first bishop. A settled presidency obtained, and the name of angel was first given to him though that of bishop soon succeeded. That this was the case in the seven churches of Asia, is certain. The address of the charges to him in the book of The Revelation demonstrates his superiority. The deacon it is well known, was chosen to administer in sacred employments of an inferior kind. These three ranks appear to have been general in the former part of this century through the christian world.

It has been an error common to all parties, to treat these little subjects, as if they were *jure divino*, or, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, unalterable. Could it conveniently be done, I think however, that a reduced episcopacy, in which the dioceses are of small extent, as those in the primitive church undoubtedly were, in which the president residing in the metropolis exercises a superintendency over ten or twelve presbyters of the same city and neighbourhood, something like the form of government which obtains in some large parishes in England, Leeds and Halifax in Yorkshire, for instance, would bid the fairest to promote order, peace, and harmony.

But the christian world has been more anxious to support different modes of government, than to be-

Ch. i. Philip.

† Acts xx. 17.

have as christians ought to do in each of them. A subject of much greater importance is suggested to us by a passage in the Epistle to the Magnesians, "As there are two coins, one of God, the other of the world, and each of them is impressed with its own character, the unbelievers are of this world, the believers in love have the character of God the Father through Jesus, into whose sufferings if we are unwilling to die, his life is not in us." Thus does Ignatius call our attention to the grand distinction of men into two sorts before God, of which whoever has felt the force, will be little solicitous concerning other distinctions.

Let us hear Ignatius' testimony to the deity of Christ, and to justification by his grace through faith, and to the constant influences of the Holy Spirit. And we shall see at the same time, how the Jewish leaven of self-righteousness had not ceased to attempt at least to darken and to corrupt these essentials of the gospel. The Jews must have been at this time in a very low state; yet their pharisaism is so congenial to the human mind, that ministers in all ages will see occasion to warn their people against it, as well as Ignatius.

"Be not deceived with heterodox opinions, nor old, unprofitable fables. For if we still live according to judaism, we confess that we have not received grace. For the divine prophets lived according to Jesus Christ. For this they were persecuted, being inspired by his grace to assure the disobedient, that there is one God, who manifested himself by Jesus Christ his Son, who is his Eternal Word. If then they have cast off indeed the old state, and are come to a new hope in Christ, let them no longer observe the Jewish sabbath, but live according to the life of the Lord,* in which also our Life rose again by himself and by his death, which some deny, by whom we have received the mystery of believing, and on account of this we endure, that we may be found disciples of Jesus Christ our only teacher. How can we live without him, whose dis-

* Κυριακὴν ζῶντιν—A manifest intimation to them to observe the Lord's day.

"ciples even the prophets were, and in spirit expected
 "him as their teacher. Let us not then be insensible
 "of his loving kindness. For if he measured to us ac-
 "cording to what we have done, we are ruined. There-
 "fore being his disciples, let us learn to live according
 "to christianity: For he who follows any other name
 "than this, is not of God. Lay aside then the old, bit-
 "ter leaven, and be transformed into a new leaven,
 "which is Jesus Christ; for christianity does not be-
 "lieve in judaism, but judaism in christianity, that every
 "tongue believing in God might be gathered together.
 "These things I warn you, my beloved, not because I
 "have known some of you thus disposed, but as the
 "least of you I am willing to admonish you, that you
 "fall not into the snares of vain glory, but that you may
 "be well assured of the nativity, suffering, and resur-
 "rection, during the government of Pontius Pilate, of
 "which literally and really Jesus Christ was the sub-
 "ject, who is our hope, from which may none of you
 "be turned aside. I know that ye are not puffed up;
 "for ye have Jesus Christ in yourselves, and the more
 "I praise you, the more I know that you are ashamed."
 Beautiful view of their genuine humility!

"Study then to be confirmed in the doctrines of the
 "Lord and the apostles, that in all things which ye do,
 "ye may have good success in flesh and spirit, in faith
 "and love, in the Son, and the Father, and the Spirit;
 "knowing that ye are full of God, I have briefly exhort-
 "ed you. Remember me in your prayers, that I may
 "come to God, and to the church in Syria, of which I
 "am unworthy to be called a member. For I need
 "your united prayer in God, and your charity, that the
 "church in Syria may be thought worthy to partake of
 "the dew of heavenly grace through your church.
 "The Ephesians from Smyrna, whence I write, salute
 "you, present before the glory of God, as you also,
 "who in all things have refreshed me, together with
 "Polycarp, bishop of the Smyrneans, and the rest of the
 "churches in the honour of Jesus Christ salute you.
 "Be strong in the concord of God, possessing an in-
 "separable Spirit, which is Jesus Christ."

From Smyrna he wrote also to the church of Tralles, the bishop of which was Polybius, "who so rejoiced with me," says he, "that I beheld all your multitude in him. Receiving therefore your divine benevolence through him, I seemed to find you as I have known you to be, followers of God. For since ye are subject to the bishop as to Jesus Christ, you appear to me to live not after man, but after Jesus Christ who died for us, that, believing in his death, you might escape death."

In what follows we have an intimation of the weak and infant state of this church, which, though sound, had probably not been so long planted as the rest. And the martyr seems to express some consciousness of the superior attainments and gifts which he possessed, but checked with deep humility.

"I have a strong savour of God, but I take a just measure of myself, lest I perish by boasting. For now I must more abundantly fear, and not attend to those who would inflate me with pride; I love indeed to suffer, but do not know whether I am worthy; I need gentleness of spirit, by which the prince of this world is dissolved. Cannot I write to you of heavenly things? But I fear lest I should hurt you, being infants. Excuse me then, lest, through incapacity of receiving you be suffocated." He goes on to guard them against schisms and heresies, to remind them of the foundation of the gospel, Christ and him crucified, and in his usual manner to recommend obedience to their pastors; and he modestly thus concludes, "As yet I am not out of the reach of danger; but the Father is faithful in Jesus Christ, to fulfil my petition and yours, in whom may we be found blameless."

The subject of his letter to the Roman christians was, to intreat them not to use any methods for his deliverance. He had the prize of martyrdom before him, and he was unwilling to be robbed of it. He speaks with uncommon pathos; but take his own words.

"I fear your charity, lest it should hinder me, for it will be easy for you to do what you please. But it is difficult for me to attain to God if you spare me. If

“you be silent in my behalf, I shall be made partaker
“of God; but if you love my flesh, I shall again have
“my course to run. I write to the churches and signify to them all, that I die willingly for God, unless
“you prevent. I beseech you, that you shew not an
“unreasonable benevolence toward me. Suffer me to
“be the food of beasts, by whom I shall attain to God.
“I am God’s wheat and shall be ground by the teeth
“of wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread
“of God. Rather encourage the beasts, that they may
“become my sepulchre, that nothing of my body may be
“left, that I may give no trouble to any one when I
“fall asleep. From Syria to Rome, I fight with wild
“beasts, by land and sea, by night and day, chained to
“ten leopards, who are made even worse by kind treatment. By their injuries I learn the more to be a
“disciple, yet am I not hereby justified. May I enjoy
“the wild beasts which are prepared for me; I
“wish they may exercise all their fierceness upon me,
“whom I will encourage, that they may assuredly devour me, and not use me as some, whom they have
“feared to touch. But if they will not do it willingly,
“I will provoke them to it. Pardon me, I know what
“is good for me. Now I begin to be a disciple; nor
“shall any thing move me, of things visible and invisible, that I may enjoy Jesus Christ. Let fire and the
“cross, let the companies of wild beasts, let breaking
“of bones and tearing of limbs, let the grinding of the
“whole body, and all the malice of the devil come upon me; be it so, only may I enjoy Jesus Christ. All
“the ends of the world, and the kingdoms of it will
“profit me nothing. It is better for me to die for Jesus Christ, than to reign over the ends of the earth.
“Him I seek who died for us; Him I desire who rose again for us. He is my gain laid up for me, suffer
“me to imitate the passion of my God. If any of you
“have Him within you, let him conceive what I feel,
“and sympathize with me, knowing what a conflict I
“have. The prince of this world wishes to carry me
“away, and to corrupt my purpose toward God. Let

“none of you present assist him. My love is crucified, and there is in me no fire that loves water, *or its own extinction*, but living and speaking in me, it says, Come to the Father. I have no delight in the bread that perisheth, nor in the pleasures of this life; I long for the bread of God, the flesh of Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, and I desire to drink his blood, incorruptible love.”

Certainly no words can express in a stronger manner the intenseness of spiritual desire, and one may look down with contempt and pity on all the magnanimity of secular heroes and patriots, as compared with it. Yet I have some doubt, whether all this flame, strong and sincere as it unquestionably was, had not something mixed with it by no means of so pure a kind. For I mean not to carry the reader's admiration or my own beyond the limits of human imbecility. Ought not the Roman christians to endeavour to save Ignatius' life by all honest means? Has any man a right to hinder others from attempting to save his life? Or will his intreaties give them a right to be as indifferent for his preservation as he himself is? Ought not every man however prepared for death, and preferring it, if God please, to use all possible methods, consistent with a good conscience, to preserve his life?

I cannot answer these queries to the advantage of Ignatius' determination. Was not his desire of martyrdom excessive? If he was wrong, it was doubtless a mistake of his judgment. I fear the example of Ignatius did harm in this respect in the church. Martyrdom was, we know, made too much of in the third century; so hard is it to be kept from all extremes; ours are generally of the opposite kind.

I am induced to suffer my thoughts to run in this strain, by looking at St. Paul. He indeed would go to Jerusalem, though he knew he should be bound. But the certainty of death was not before his eyes, and therefore his resolution in this case is not similar to that of Ignatius. As for the rest, he took no pains to dissuade others from saving his life. He took pains, to

save it himself. He blames his friends at Rome for deserting him. And the eagerness for martyrdom which Ignatius expresses, I see neither in Paul nor in any of the apostles. They rather refer themselves calmly to the will of God in things which concern themselves. On the whole, there appears in Ignatius, the same zeal for God and love to Jesus Christ, and the same holy contempt of earthly things, which was so eminent in the apostles; but I suspect, not an equal degree of calm resignation to the divine will.

The time which he was allowed to spend at Smyrna, in company with his beloved Polycarp and other friends, must have been highly agreeable to him. But his keepers were impatient of their long stay; the reasons were most probably of a maritime nature. The season for the public spectacles at Rome was advancing, and they were afraid of not arriving in time. They now set sail for Troas, where at his arrival he was refreshed with the news of the persecution ceasing in the church of Antioch. He had been attended hither by Burrhus, the deacon of Polycarp; and him he dispatched with an Epistle to the Philadelphians, by way of return for the visit which their bishop had paid him at Troas. For here also several churches sent their messengers to visit and to salute him, and Providence so far restrained the inhumanity of his guards, that he was allowed to have intercourse with them. He wrote here three Epistles more.

The Philadelphians appear still to be favoured with the same spirit of grace, by which they had been already so honourably distinguished among the seven churches of Asia. He recommends, as usual, unity, concord, obedience; not that he had found any thing amiss in them in these respects.

One may form some idea of the manner in which these primitive christians enjoyed the grace of God, and admired and loved it, as it appeared in one another, by his way of speaking of the Philadelphian bishop, whose name is not given to us, "whom" says he, "I know not from himself, nor by men to have obtained

“the ministry for the common good of saints, nor through vain glory, but in the love of God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. I am perfectly charmed with his meekness; when silent, he exhibits more power than vain speakers. He recommends to them to preserve an unity in the administration of the Lord’s Supper. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup in the unity of his blood, one altar, as also one bishop, with the presbytery and deacons my fellow servants, that ye may do whatever ye do according to the will of God.”

The firmness of christian faith, and his zeal against the spirit of self-righteousness, are observable in the following passage. “If any interpret judaism to you, hear him not. For it is better to hear the gospel from a circumcised person, than judaism from an uncircumcised one. But if both speak not of Jesus Christ, they are to me pillars and sepulchres of the dead, on which are written only the names of men.”

Having spoken of the ancients, he says, “the ancient things to me are Jesus Christ, the ancient things inaccessible to man, his cross, and death, and resurrection, and faith which is in him, in which I desire (through your prayer) to be justified. He begs them to send a deacon to Antioch, to congratulate his people on the cessation of persecution. Toward the conclusion he speaks of Philo, the deacon from Cilicia, who ministered to him, together with Agathopes a choice saint, who, renouncing the world, had followed him from Syria.

He wrote also from Troas to the Smyrneans, and his commendations of them are consonant to the character they bear in the book of The Revelation. They had weathered the storm of persecution, which was there prophesied of, fulfilled, I apprehend, under Domitian, and had probably enjoyed the ministry of Polycarp from St. John’s time. The most striking thing in this Epistle, is the zeal with which he warns them against the Docetæ. In what lay the evil of their heresy? It took away the atoning blood of Christ, and the hope of a

blessed resurrection. In what lies the real glory of christian religion in his view, is not hard to understand; and it is worth while for modern divines to learn from him. "I glorify Jesus Christ our God, who hath given you wisdom. For I understand, that you are perfect in the immoveable faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, who *really* was of the seed of David according to the flesh; born of the virgin *really*, who *really* suffered under Pontius Pilate. For all these things he suffered for us, that we might be saved. And he *truly* suffered, as also he *truly* raised up himself, not as some infidels say that he *seemed* to suffer, themselves only *seeming* to be, and as they think, it shall happen to them. I forewarn you of those beasts, who are in the shape of men, whom you ought not only not to receive, but if possible not even to meet with." An humble and thankful sense of the unspeakable value of Christ, leads naturally to this charity, and the want of it leaves men always under the appearance of candour to a cruel insensibility of heart, and an undistinguishing skepticism. "Only you ought to pray for them, if they may be converted, which is a difficult case. But Jesus Christ, our true life, has the power of this." It seems, that these heretics with their usual artifices laboured to work themselves into the good graces of Ignatius. He sees through their designs, and says, "for what does it profit me, if any man commend me, and yet blaspheme my Lord, denying him to have come in the flesh? They separate from the eucharist and from prayer, because they confess not the eucharist to be the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who suffered for our sins. They who contradict the gift of God, die in their reasonings." Union with the bishop he strenuously insists on. "It is not lawful without the bishop, to baptize, or to make an *αγάπη* (love feast.)"

We see the method of true christians in these times. They carefully separated from heretics; they beheld their views with horror; they stuck close to Christ. His godhead, manhood, atonement, priesthood were

inestimably precious in their eyes. They could not allow those to be christians at all, who denied the fundamentals. In fine they preserved order and close connexion with their pastors; they did nothing in religion without them. These were the means of preserving truth among them. And the long course of evangelical prosperity in these churches, under God, may be ascribed to them.

One letter only remains to be mentioned, that to Polycarp. In the advice which he gives to him, we may see a just picture of pastoral integrity, wisdom, and charity. The whole of it deserves to be studied by all ministers. The more holy any pastor is, the more will he be sensible of the need of a wisdom and strength more than human. The disadvantages in which a poor sinful worm is involved, who has to contend against the united powers of the world and the devil, amidst the corrupt workings of his own nature, the open opposition of the profane, and the faults of God's own people, cannot even be conceived by a mere secular clergy, intent only on ease, preferment, or at best on literary indulgences and external decorum; as little will they be conceived by those ambitious and turbulent teachers, who are so swallowed up in political dreams, as to forget that Christ's kingdom is not of this world.

“I exhort thee, by the grace with which thou art
“clothed, to apply thyself to thy course, and to ex-
“hort all, that they may be saved. Do justice to thy
“station in all diligence both temporal and spiritual.
“Be studious of that best of blessings, unity. Bear
“with all, as also the Lord doth with thee. Bear with
“all in charity, as thou also dost. Find time for prayer
“without ceasing. Ask for more understanding than
“thou hast at present. Watch, possessing a spirit
“ever attentive. Speak to each separately, according
“to the help of God. Bear with the diseases of all, as
“a perfect combatant. The more labour the more
“reward. If thou love only the obedient disciples,
“thou evidencest no grace. Rather bring into orderly

“subjecting the turbulent in meekness. Every wound
 “is not cured by the same method of application.
 “Watch as a divine wrestler, thy theme is immortality
 “and eternal life. Let not those who seem experienc-
 “ed christians, and are yet unsound in the faith, stag-
 “ger thee. Stand firm as an anvil continually struck.
 “It is the character of a great wrestler to be mangled
 “and yet to conquer. Be more studious than thou
 “art. Consider the times, and expect him who is
 “above all time, who is unconnected with time, the in-
 “visible One made visible for us,—the impassable but
 “passable for us; who bore all sorts of sufferings for
 “us. Let not widows be neglected. Next to the
 “Lord do thou take care of them. Let nothing be
 “done without thy cognizance. Do thou nothing with-
 “out the mind of God. Let assemblies be more fre-
 “quently held. Seek out all by name. Despise not
 “slaves of either sex; yet let them not be puffed up,
 “but serve more faithfully to the glory of God, that
 “they may obtain a better liberty from God. Let
 “them not desire to be set at liberty at the charge of
 “the church, lest they be found slaves of lust. If any
 “can remain in chastity for the honour of the Lord, let
 “them do so without boasting. If they boast, they
 “are lost; and if the man set himself up above the
 “bishop, he is lost. It behoves the married to enter
 “into that connexion with the consent of the bishop,
 “that their marriage may be after the will of God, and
 “not to fulfil the lusts of the flesh.”

From Troas Ignatius being brought to Neapolis
 passed by Philippi through Macedonia, and that part
 of Epirus, which is next to Epidamnus. Having
 found a ship in one of the sea ports, his conductors
 sailed over the Adriatic, and from thence entering into
 the Tuscan sea, and passing by several islands and cit-
 ies, at length they came in view of Puteoli, which be-
 ing shewn to him, he hastened to go forth, desirous to
 tread in the steps of the apostle Paul; but a violent
 wind arising would not permit him to accomplish this
 design. The wind continuing favourable in one day

and night, "we indeed" (say the relaters of the martyrdom, his attendants) "were unwillingly hurried on, as sorrowing to think of being separated from the martyr. But to him it happened according to his wish, that he might sooner leave the world, and depart to his Lord whom he loved. Wherefore sailing into the Roman port, and those impure sports being at an end, the soldiers began to be offended with his slowness, but the bishop joyfully complied with their hastiness." The port was at Ostia, some miles from Rome, and here he was met by the Roman christians, who intimated their strong desire for his preservation. Some of them probably had some influence, and were willing to try it. Ignatius however was inflexible. He was now brought to Rome and presented to the prefect of the city.

When he was led to execution he was attended by a number of the brethren, and was allowed to join in prayer with them. And he prayed to the Son of God* in behalf of the churches, that he would put a stop to the persecution, and continue the love of the brethren toward each other. He was then led into the amphitheatre, and speedily thrown to the wild beasts. He had here also his wish. The beasts were his grave. A few bones only were left, which the deacons gathered, carefully preserved, and afterwards buried at Antioch.

The writers thus conclude. "We have made known to you both the day and the time, that being assembled together according to the time of his martyrdom, we may communicate with the magnanimous martyr of Christ, who trode under foot the devil, and completed the course which he had devoutly wished in Christ Jesus our Lord, by whom and with whom all glory and power be to the Father with the blessed Spirit for ever. Amen."

Usher has preserved, or rather restored to us also an Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians. It breathes the

* I use the expression of the Acts: let the reader make the obvious inference for himself.

same spirit as those of his fellow disciple, but has less pathos and vigour of sentiment. Quotations from it will be needless. He begs the Philippians to communicate to him what they knew of Ignatius, whom they had seen at Philippi, after his departure from Smyrna. We see hence how the churches then formed one large fraternity, abstracted from partial views of supporting little factions and interests. He exhorts them to obey the word of righteousness, and to exercise all patience, which they had seen exemplified in Ignatius, and in others among themselves, and in Paul himself, and the rest of the apostles; for they loved not this present world, but him who died and was raised again by God for us. By his account it appears, that the Philippians still retained the christian spirit. One of the presbyters, Valens and his wife, had sinned through covetousness. Would to God such spots in the pastoral character were as singular in our times! Polycarp beautifully expresses his charitable concern for them, and exhorts them, in affectionate sympathy, to endeavour to restore their spiritual health.

Thus much for Trajan's persecution, for the spirit of christians, so far as it can be collected, at that time, for the martyrdom of Ignatius, and for the signal glory which God was pleased to diffuse around it among the churches.

CHAPTER II.

The History of Christians during the Reigns of Adrian and Antoninus Pius.

TRAJAN died in the year 117. The latter part of his reign had been employed in his great military expedition into the East, whence he lived not to return. His exploits and triumphs fall not within my province; I have no business with him except in that line, in which to a christian he must appear to the greatest disadvantage,

and out of which it were heartily to be wished, that he had ever given any evidence of a desire to remove. His successor, Adrian, appears not to have ever issued any persecuting edicts. But the iniquity of his predecessor survived, and Adrian's silent acquiescence for a time, gave it sufficient scope to exert itself in acts of barbarity.

In the mean time the gospel spread more and more. A number of apostolical persons demonstrated by their conduct, that the Spirit, which had influenced the apostles, rested upon them. Filled with divine charity, they distributed their substance to the poor, and travelled into regions, which as yet had not heard the sound of the gospel; and having planted the faith, they ordained other persons as pastors, committing to them the culture of the new ground, and passed themselves to other countries. Hence numbers through grace embraced the doctrine of salvation, at the first hearing, with much alacrity.* It is natural to admire here the power of grace in the production of so pure and charitable a spirit, to contrast it with the illiberal selfishness too prevalent even among the best in our days, and to regret how little is done for the propagation of the gospel through the world, by nations whose aids of commerce and navigation are so much superior to those enjoyed by the ancients. One advantage these christians possessed indeed, which we have not. They were all one body, one church, of one name, and cordially loved one another as brethren. The attention to fundamentals, to real christianity, was not dissipated by schismatic peculiarities, nor was the body of Christ rent in pieces by factions. There were indeed many heretics; but real christians admitted them not into their communities; the line of distinction was drawn with sufficient precision, and a dislike of the person or offices of Christ, and of the real spirit of holiness, discriminated the heretics: and separation from them, while it was undoubtedly the best mark of charity to their souls, tended to preserve the faith and love of true christians in genuine purity.

* Euseb. h. s. ch. 10.

Among these holy men Quadratus was much distinguished. He succeeded Publius in the bishopric of Athens, who had suffered martyrdom either in this or the foregoing reign. He found the flock in a dispersed and confused state,* their public assemblies were deserted, their zeal was grown cold and languid, their lives and manners were corrupted, and they seemed likely to apostatize from christianity. Quadratus laboured to recover them with much zeal and with equal success.† Order and discipline were restored, and with them the holy flame of godliness. One of the strongest testimonies of these things, is the account which the famous Origen, (who lived some years after) in the second book of his treatise against Celsus, gives of the Athenian church. While this great man is demonstrating the admirable efficacy of christian faith on the minds of men, he exemplifies his positions by this very church of Athens, on account of its good order, constancy, meekness, and quietness, infinitely superior to the common political assembly at Athens, which was factious and tumultuary, and no way to be compared with the christian church in that city: he affirms that it was evident, that the worst parts of the church were better than the best of their popular assemblies. This is a very pleasing testimony to the growth of christianity, since the time that a handful of seed was sown there by St. Paul; and let the testimony of so penetrating and sagacious an observer as Origen be considered, as one of the many proofs that might be given of the happy effect which real christianity has on human society. To a mind not intoxicated with vain ideas of secular glory, the christian part of Athens must appear infinitely more happy and more respectable, than that commonwealth ever had been in the meridian of its glory. But we hope in future pages to give much stronger proofs of the advantages derived to society from the gospel.

In the sixth year of his reign, Adrian came to Athens, and was initiated in the Eleusinian mysteries. This

* Euseb. b. ch. 4. 22.

† Cave's Life of Quadratus.

prince was remarkably fond of Pagan institutions, and by this very circumstance demonstrated a spirit extremely foreign to christianity. The persecutors proceeded with sanguinary vigour ; when Quadratus at length presented an apology to the emperor, defending the gospel from the calumnies of its enemies ; in which he particularly took notice of our Saviour's miracles, his curing diseases, and raising the dead, some instances of which, he says, were alive in his time.

Aristides, a christian writer at that time in Athens, addressed himself also to Adrian in an apology on the same subject. The good sense of the emperor at length was roused to do justice to his innocent subjects. The apologies of the two writers may be reasonably supposed to have had some effect on his mind. Yet a letter from Serenius Granianus, proconsul of Asia, may be conceived to have moved him still more. He wrote to the emperor, that it seemed to him unreasonable, that the christians should be put to death, merely to gratify the clamours of the people, without trial, and without any crime proved against them. This seems the first instance of any Roman governor daring publicly to throw out ideas contradictory to Trajan's iniquitous maxims, which inflicted death on christians as such, abstracted from any moral guilt. And it seems to me a sufficient proof, that the severe sufferings of christians at this period, which appear to have been very remarkable in Asia, were more owing to the active and sanguinary spirit of persecution itself, which, from Trajan's example, was become very fashionable, than to any explicit regard for his edicts. We have Adrian's rescript addressed to Minucius Fundanus, the successor of Granianus, whose government seems to have been nearly expired when he wrote to the emperor.

To Minucius Fundanus.

“ I have received a letter written to me by the very illustrious Serenius Granianus, whom you have succeeded. To me then the affair seems by no means fit

“to be slightly passed over, that men may not be disturbed without cause, and that sycophants may not be encouraged in their odious practices. If the people of the province will appear publicly, and make open charges against the christians, so as to give them an opportunity of answering for themselves, let them proceed in that manner only, and not by rude demands and mere clamours. For it is much more proper, if any will accuse them, that you should take cognizance of these matters. If any then accuse, and shew that they commit any thing against the laws, do you determine according to the nature of the crime. But, by Hercules,* if the charge be a mere calumny, do you estimate the enormity of the offence, and punish it as it deserves.”

Notwithstanding the obscurity, which I find Dr. Jortin and Dr. Lardner suppose to be in this rescript, I cannot but think it clearly shews that it was the intention of the emperor to prevent christians from being punished as such. The only reason for hesitation which I can see is the inconsistency of it with Trajan's rescript. But it does not appear that Adrian meant the conduct of his predecessor to be the model of his own, and we shall see in the next reign still clearer proofs of the equity of Adrian's views. It is but a piece of justice due to this emperor, to free his character from the charge of persecution, and christians of that or any age could not object to the propriety of punishing them equally with other men, if they violated the laws of the state. But it is the glory of the times we are now reviewing, that no men were more innocent, peaceable, and well-disposed citizens than they. Yet the enmity of men's minds against real godliness, so natural in all ages, laid them under extreme disadvantages unknown to others, in vindicating themselves from unjust aspersions; and this forms indeed one of the most painful crosses which good men must endure in this life. One of these disadvantages was, the many heretics who,

* This is an oath, demonstrating only the earnestness of the writer in his declarations, according to the usual profaneness of men.

wearing the name of christians, were guilty of the most detestable enormities. These were indiscriminately charged by the Pagans on christians in general. This circumstance, in addition to other still more important reasons, rendered them careful in preserving the line of separation distinct; and by the excellency of their doctrine, and the purity of their lives, they were enabled gradually to overcome all uncandid insinuations.

There is extant also a letter of Adrian,* in which he speaks of the christians as very numerous at Alexandria, and of christian bishops, in a manner, as considerable as the priests of Serapis. Since St. Mark's time, it is evident, though we have scarce any particular accounts, that the gospel must have flourished abundantly in Egypt.

But the same equitable rule of government, which forbad Adrian to punish the christians, led him to be very severe against the Jews; for now appeared Barchochebas, who pretended to be the star prophesied of by Balaam. This miserable people, who had rejected the true Christ, received the imposter with open arms; who led them into horrid crimes, and amongst the rest into a cruel treatment of the christians.† The issue of the rebellion was the entire exclusion of the Jews from the city and territory of Jerusalem. Another city was erected in its stead, and called after the emperor's name, *Ælia*. This leads us to consider how the state of the mother-church of Jerusalem was affected by this great revolution. The christian Jews previous to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, as it has been observed, had retired to Pella, a little town beyond Jordan, inhabited by Gentiles. The unexpected retreat of Cestius had given them this opportunity of effecting their escape. How long they continued here, is uncertain. They must however have returned before Adrian's time, who, coming to Jerusalem forty-seven years

* Vopiscus, b. 2. 67.

† Justin Martyr, in his first (commonly called second Apology) observes that Barchochebas cruelly tortured the christians, who refused to deny and blaspheme Jesus Christ.

after the devastation, found there a few houses and a little church of christians built on mount Sion. Here the church of Jerusalem kept their solemn assemblies, and seemed to have acquired a splendid accession by the conversion of Aquila, the emperor's kinsman, whom he made governor and overseer of the new city. But still pursuing his magic and astrological studies, he was cast out of the church. Strong proof that the mother church still retained a measure of its pristine purity and discipline. Corrupt churches are glad to retain persons of eminence in their communion, however void of the spirit of the gospel. Aquila, incensed, apostatized to judaism, and translated the Old Testament into Greek.*

Eusebius, b. 4. ch. 5. gives us a list of the bishops who successively presided in Jerusalem. The first was the apostle James, the second Simeon, both whose stories have been recorded. He mentions thirteen more, but we have no account of their characters and actions. During all this time something judaical seems to have continued in their practice; though Jewish ideas would naturally decay by degrees. The revolution under Adrian, at length put a total end to the Jewish church, by the extirpation and banishment of this people. To such outward changes is the church of Christ subject; a new church however arose in Ælia, of the Gentiles, whose first bishop was Mark.

Adrian, after a reign of twenty-one years, was succeeded by Antoninus Pius, who appears to have been, at least in his own personal character and intentions, always guiltless of christian blood. It was very difficult for the enemies of Christ to support their persecuting spirit, with any tolerably specious pretensions. The abominations of heretics, whom ignorance and malice will ever confound with real christians, furnished them with some. Probably these were much exaggerated; but whatever they were, the whole christian name was accused of them. Incest and the devouring of infants

* Cave's Life of Simeon.

were charged upon them, and thus a handle was afforded for the barbarous treatment of the best of mankind; till time detected the slanders, and men became at length ashamed of affecting to believe, what was in its own nature improbable, and was supported by no evidence. It pleased God at this time to endow some christians with the power of defending his truth by the manly arms of rational argumentation. Justin Martyr presented his first Apology to the emperor Antoninus Pius, about the third year of his reign, A. D. 140. He was of that species of men who in those days were usually called philosophers. His conversion to christianity, his views and spirit, his labours and sufferings, will deserve to be considered in a distinct chapter. Suffice it here to say, that the information and arguments which his first Apology contained, were not in vain. Antoninus was a man of sense and humanity, open to conviction, uncorrupted by the vain and chimerical philosophy of the times, and desirous of doing justice to all mankind. Asia Propria was still the scene of vital christianity and of cruel persecution. Thence the christians applied to Antoninus, complaining of the many injuries which they sustained from the people of the country, who it seems laid to the charge of the christians the earthquakes which had lately happened. The Pagans were much terrified, and ascribed them to the vengeance of Heaven against the christians. We have both in Eusebius* and at the end of Justin's first Apology, the edict sent to the common council of Asia, every line of which will deserve our attention.

The Emperor to the Common Council of Asia.

“I am quite of opinion, that the gods will take care
 “to discover such persons. For it much more con-
 “cerns them to punish those who refuse to worship
 “them than you, if they be able. But you harass and
 “vex them, and accuse them of atheism and other

* B. 4. xi, xii, xiii.

“crimes, which you can by no means prove. To them
 “it appears an advantage to die for their religion, and they
 “gain their point, while they throw away their lives,
 “rather than comply with your injunctions. As to
 “the earthquakes, which have happened in past times,
 “or lately, is it not proper to remind you of your own
 “despondency when they happen, to desire you to
 “compare your spirit with theirs, and observe how se-
 “renely they confide in God? In such seasons you
 “seem to be ignorant of the gods, and neglect their
 “worship, and you live in the practical ignorance of
 “the Supreme God himself, and you harass and perse-
 “cute to death those who do worship him. Concern-
 “ing these men some others of the provincial governors
 “wrote to our divine father (Adrian) to whom he re-
 “turned answer, that they should not be molested, un-
 “less they appeared to attempt something against the
 “Roman government. Many also have signified to me
 “concerning these men, to whom I have returned an
 “answer, agreeably to the maxims of my father. But
 “if any will still accuse any of them as such (as chris-
 “tians) let the accused be acquitted, though he appear
 “to be a christian, and let the accuser be punished.”
 Set up at Ephesus in the common assembly of Asia.

Eusebius informs us, that this was no empty edict, but was really put in execution. Nor did this emperor content himself with one edict. He wrote to the same purport to the Larisseans, the Thessalonians, the Athenians, and all the Greeks.

As this prince reigned twenty-three years, such vigorous measures must, after some time at least, have had their effect. And we may fairly conclude that during a great part of this reign the christians were permitted to worship God in peace. A few remarks on the conduct of this prince, and the facts which appear on the face of his edict, will be here not improper.

1. There are, it seems, some instances of princes, even in ancient history, not unacquainted with the just principles of religious liberty, which are now more generally understood. Not the most intelligent legislator

in any age, understood the natural rights of conscience better than Antoninus Pius. He saw that christians, as such, ought not to be punished. His subjects, bigoted and barbarous, were far from thinking so, and it was not till after repeated edicts and menaces, that he forced them to cease from persecution.

2. In the conduct of this emperor one may see how far human nature may advance in moral virtue by its natural resources, while it remains destitute of the grace of God and a real principle of holiness. If the advocates of natural morality, considered as abstracted from christianity, were to fix on a character the most able to support the weight of their cause, it would be their interest to put it into the hands of Antoninus Pius. He would defend it, not with pompous systems and declamatory flourishes, but by an amiable, generous, and magnanimous conduct. I have been astonished at the character that is given of him. Doubtless a more distinct and explicit detail of his life would lessen our admiration. We have not the opportunity of knowing him so thoroughly as Socrates and Cicero. The former by the writings of his scholars, the latter by his own, are known as minutely, as if they were our contemporaries. Could the emperor be as accurately surveyed, possibly something of the supercilious pride of the Grecian, or of the ridiculous vain glory of the Roman patriot, might appear. They are both very eminent patterns of moral virtue; but yet, with all the disadvantages of such imperfect historians as Victor and Julius Capitolinus, they must give the palm to Antoninus. Despotism seems in his hands to have been only an instrument of doing good to mankind. His temper was mild and gentle in a very high degree; yet the vigour of his government was as striking, as if he had been of the most keen and irritable disposition. He took care of his subjects with so great diligence, that he attended to all persons and things, as if they had been his private property.* Scarce any fault is ascribed

* Juli Capitol. Vit. Anton. ch. 7. See Lardner's Collections, ch. xiv.

to him, but that he carried his inquisitive temper to excess. His successor the second Antoninus owns, that he was religious without superstition, and that he was not superstitious in the worship of the gods. This we have in his stoical meditations still extant.* We cannot therefore doubt but that he had an opportunity of knowing what christianity was. He knew something of it, and he approved of the moral conduct of christians. He gives them the most honourable character, has no fear of them as disloyal or turbulent, and makes comparisons between them and Pagans to the advantage of the former. From an expression in the edict, "if they be able," one is almost tempted to suspect, that he had very little internal respect for the gods. Were there no God, no divine Providence, and no future state, the virtue of this man would doubtless be complete. But his case shews, that it is possible, by the united influence of good sense and good temper, for a man to be extremely beneficent to his fellow creatures, without the least regard to his Maker. Surely were christianity and mere moral virtue the same things, Antoninus ought to be called a christian. Yet it does not appear that he ever seriously studied the gospel. A skeptical carelessness and indifference, not unlike that temper which, under the names of candour and moderation, has now overspread the face of Europe, seems to have possessed the mind of this amiable prince; and while he attended to the temporal good of mankind, and felicitated himself on his good actions, he seemed to forget that he had a soul accountable to the Supreme Being, and scarce to think it possible, that it should have any guilt to answer for before him. The evil of such a contempt of God is what mankind are of all things least inclined to discern. Yet it is the evil of all others the most vehemently opposed in scripture under the several branches of idolatry, unbelief, self-righteousness, and pride. And without a knowledge of it, and a humble sense of guilt on account of it, the very na-

* B. 6. ch. 50.

ture of the gospel itself cannot be understood. The conclusion resulting from this consideration is, that godliness is perfectly distinct from morality, which always flourishes indeed where godliness is, but is capable of a separate existence.

3. The edict of this good emperor is a singularly valuable testimony in favour of the christians of that time. It appears that there were then a race of men devoted to the service of Christ, ready to die for his name and on account of his religion, rather than to renounce it, who exemplified the superior worth of that religion by a superior probity and innocence of manners, so as to appear as the best of subjects in the opinion of an emperor of the highest candour, intelligence, and acute observation. They were not inferior to the best of the heathens in morality, and had besides, what this emperor confesses their enemies were void of, a sincere spirit of reverence for the Supreme Being, an unaffected contempt of death, and that to which stoicism pretends, a real serenity of mind under the most pressing dangers, and this grounded on an unshaken confidence in God. We see hence that the out-pouring of the Spirit of God, which began at the feast of Pentecost, was still continued. Christians were so in power, and not in name only, by the testimony of an heathen prince; and those who would substitute morality in the room of their religion, would do well to consider, that good morality itself knows no support like that of christianity. This divine religion comprehends every possible good thing that can be found in all others, and has, over and above, its own peculiar virtues, and a fund of consolation and an energy of support under the prospect of death itself, and points out the only safe and sure road to a blissful immortality.

CHAPTER III.

Justin Martyr.

THIS great man was born at Neapolis in Samaria, anciently called Sichem. His father was a Gentile, probably one of the Greeks, belonging to the colony transplanted thither, who gave his son a philosophical education. In his youth he travelled for the improvement of his understanding, and Alexandria afforded him all the entertainment which an inquisitive mind could derive from the fashionable studies. The Stoics appeared to him at first the masters of happiness. He gave himself up to one of this sect, till he found he could learn nothing from him of the nature of God. It is remarkable (as he tells us himself*) that his tutor told him this was a knowledge by no means necessary ; which much illustrates the views of Dr. Warburton concerning these ancient philosophers, that they were atheists in reality. He next betook himself to a peripatetic, whose anxious desire of settling the price of his instructions convinced Justin, that truth did not dwell with him. A pythagorean next engaged his attention, who requiring of him the previous knowledge of music, astronomy, and geometry, dismissed him for the present, when he understood he was unfurnished with those studies. In much solicitude he applied himself to a platonic philosopher, with a more plausible appearance of success than from any of the foregoing. He now gave himself to retirement. As he was walking near the sea, he was met by an aged person of a venerable appearance, whom he beheld with much attention. Do you know me ? says he ; when Justin answered in the negative, he asked him why he surveyed him with such attention ? I wondered, says he, to

* His dialogue with Trypho, whence the account of his conversion is extracted.

find any person here. The stranger observed that he was waiting for some domestics, but what brought you here, says he? Justin professed his love of private meditation; the other hinted at the absurdity of mere speculation abstracted from practice, which gave occasion to Justin to express his ardent desire of knowing God, and to expatiate on the praises of philosophy. The stranger by degrees endeavoured to cure him of his ignorant admiration of Plato and Pythagoras, and to point out to him the writings of the Hebrew prophets as being much more ancient than any of those called philosophers, and led him to some view of christianity, in its nature and in its evidences, adding, "above all things, pray that the gates of light may be opened to thee; for they are not discernible, nor to be understood by all, except God and his Christ give to a man to understand." The man having spoken these things and much more, left me, says Justin, directing me to pursue these things, and I saw him no more. Immediately a fire was kindled in my soul, and I had a strong affection for the prophets and those men who are the friends of Christ, and weighing within myself his words, I found this to be the only sure philosophy. We have no more particulars of the exercises of his his soul in religion. His conversion took place from hence some time in the reign of Adrian. But he has shewn us enough to make it evident, that conversion was then looked on as an inward spiritual work on the soul, and that he had the substance of the same work of grace which the Spirit operates at this day on real christians. There appears in his case an earnest thoughtfulness, attended with a strong desire to know God, and an experimental sense of his own ignorance, and of the insufficiency of human resources. Then the providential care of God in bringing him under the means of christian instruction, a direction to his soul to pray for spiritual illumination, the divine hunger created in his heart, and in due time the satisfactory comforts and privileges of real christianity; which with him was not mere words and declarations, but he found it,

he says, to have a formidable majesty in its nature, adapted to terrify those who are in the way of transgression, as well as a sweetness, peace, and serenity for those who are conversant in it. He owns in another of his works,* that the example of christians suffering death so serenely for their faith, moved his mind not a little; this is an obvious consideration and need not to be insisted on; it is not for the interest of the cause of those called philosophers in any age, that it should be insisted on. Justin after his conversion still wore the usual philosophic garb, which demonstrates that he retained, perhaps, too great an affection for the studies of his youth;† and if I mistake not, he always preserved a very strong tincture of the philosophic spirit, though not in such a manner as to prevent his sincere attachment to the gospel.

Coming to Rome in the time of Antoninus Pius, he there wrote a confutation of the heretics; particularly of Marcion, the son of a bishop born in Pontus, who for lewdness‡ was ejected from the church and fled to Rome, where he broached errors of an Antinomian tendency. It makes no part of my plan to define the systems of heretics, but only to speak of them as they come in my way, with a special reference to their opposition to the fundamentals of the gospel. That holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord, and which was the great design of Christ to promote, found in this pretended christian a cordial enemy; and Justin, who had tasted of the holy nature of the gospel in his own experience, withstood him both in conversation and by his writings. About the year 140, he published his excellent Apology for the Christians, addressed to Antoninus Pius, which may be reasonably supposed to have had a considerable influence on the political conduct of that prudent emperor, with respect to the christians.

* Apology Second, though misnamed the First, in all the copies of Justin.

† Cave's Life of Justin.

‡ The truth of this charge against his morals has been disputed, possibly with justice.

It appears from this performance, that it was common to accuse christians merely as such, and to charge the faults of any who bore the name on the whole body. Thus there is no new thing under the sun. The term christian was matter of obloquy at that time, as several modern terms have been since. And it requires no great degree of rational powers to shew, as Justin has done completely, the absurdity and inconclusiveness of such objections, whether ancient or modern. He takes notice also of the happy effects which the conduct of christians had then on mankind. “Many instances among us, he observes, we have to shew of powerful changes among men, of men being impressed by the sobriety and temperance of their neighbours, in favour of the gospel, or by observing the unexampled meekness of fellow travellers under cruel treatment, or the uncommon integrity and equity of those with whom they transacted business.” We see hence fresh proofs of the continuance of vital religion in the time of Justin : a man calling himself a christian, without any practical power of the religion, would scarce have then been classed among the brethren. I find also fresh proofs, in this Apology, of the strong line of distinction then kept up between christians and heretics. He observes that the latter were fond of the name, and yet were not persecuted. There was nothing in their spirit and conduct that provoked persecution. He takes notice also of the small number of Jewish converts in comparison of the main body of the nation. But this he observes, was agreeable to the prophecies of the Old Testament. He describes likewise the customs of the primitive christians in public worship, and in the administration of the sacraments, in order to shew the falsity of the charges generally urged against them.

Not long after his First Apology, Justin left Rome, and went to Ephesus, where he had his discourse with Trypho the Jew, the substance of which he gives us in his dialogue, which is still preserved to us. The most material historical circumstances relating to Justin’s own conversion, have already been recited. We may

take notice also of the common calumny against christians, of their eating men, of their extinguishing the lights, and of their promiscuous sensuality. These things, he mentions in this work, as not believed by persons of sense and candour among their enemies, and therefore not meriting a serious confutation.

On his return to Rome, he had frequent contests with Crescens the philosopher, a man equally remarkable for malignity to christians, and for the most horrid vices. Justin now presented his Second Apology to M. Antoninus Philosophus, the successor of Pius, and a determined enemy to christians. He was in hopes of softening his mind toward the christians, as he had done that of his predecessor, but in vain. Marcus was their enemy during his whole reign, and they scarce ever had an enemy more implacable. The immediate occasion of the Second Apology was this, as he himself relates.

“A certain woman at Rome had, together with her husband, lived in extreme profligacy and licentiousness. But on her conversion to christianity, being changed herself, she endeavoured to persuade her husband also to imitate her example, representing to him the punishment of eternal fire, which in a future state would be inflicted on the disobedient. But he persisting in his wickedness, she was induced to wish for a separation. By the advice of her friends she continued however to live with him, hoping in time he might be brought to repentance. Upon his coming to Alexandria, he proceeded to greater lengths of wickedness, so that, finding the connexion now no longer tolerable, she procured a divorce from him. He, not impressed with the happy change which had taken place in her dispositions, and unmoved with her compassionate attempts to rescue him from ruin, accused her of being a christian. Upon which she presented a petition to you, O emperor, that she might have time to dispose and regulate her household affairs, and after that promised to answer to the charge, which petition you granted. The husband finding his wife

"to have gained a respite from his malice, diverted it
 "to another object, to one Ptolemy, who had instruct-
 "ed her in christianity, and who had been punished by
 "Urbicius the prefect of Rome. He persuaded a cen-
 "turion his friend to imprison Ptolemy, and ask him
 "whether he was a christian. He, no flatterer or dissem-
 "bler, ingenuously confessed, and was a long time pun-
 "ished with imprisonment. At last, when he was brought
 "before Urbicius, and asked only this question wheth-
 "er he was a christian, he confessed himself a teacher
 "of the divine truth. For no true christian can act
 "otherwise. Urbicius, ordering him to be led to ex-
 "ecution, one Lucius, himself a christian, observing
 "the absurdity of these proceedings, expostulated with
 "Urbicius, on the iniquity of putting men to death
 "merely for a name, abstracted from any one specific
 "charge of guilt, a conduct unworthy of emperors such
 "as Pius the last, or Philosophus the present,* or the
 "sacred Senate. You too seem to me to be of the
 "same sect, was all that the prefect deigned to reply.
 "Lucius confessed that he was, and was himself led
 "also to execution, which he bore with triumphant
 "serenity, declaring that he was now going from un-
 "righteous governors to God his gracious Father and
 "King. A third person was sentenced also to death
 "on the same occasion. And I also, continues Justin,
 "expect by persons of this sort to be murdered, per-
 "haps by Creseens the pretended philosopher. For
 "the name really belongs not to a man who publicly
 "accuses christians of atheism and impiety, to please
 "many deceived persons, though he is totally ignorant
 "of their real character. I myself have interrogated
 "him and proved that he is quite unacquainted with
 "the subject. I am willing to undergo an examina-
 "tion before you in company with him. And if my
 "questions and his answers were known, it would ap-
 "pear evident to yourself that he knows nothing of our
 "affairs, or at least conceals what he does know."

* I am aware that the Greek in Justin would make it probable that
 Pius was then reigning; but Eusebius' contrary testimony determines
 me to think otherwise.

But Marcus was not a man to exercise common justice towards christians. The philosophic garb was no shield to Justin, even in the eyes of an emperor, who piqued himself on the surname of philosopher. The sincerity of his christian attachments outweighed every argument and every plausible appearance in his favour. Crescens procured his imprisonment for the crime of being a christian, the greatest evil of which a human being could be guilty in the eyes of this emperor. The Acts of his Martyrdom, which carry more marks of truth than many other martyrologies, give this account.* “He and six of his companions having been “apprehended, were brought before Rusticus the prefect, who I suppose had succeeded Urbicius, a man “famous for his attachment to stoicism, and a person of “considerable eminence. He had been tutor to the “emperor, who acknowledges in the First Book of his “Meditations, his obligations to him on several accounts, and particularly for his teaching him to be of “a placable and forgiving temper. An instance, one “among thousands, that it is possible for a man to “be strongly impressed with many beautiful ideas of “morality, and still to remain an inflexible enemy to the “gospel. Rusticus undertook to persuade Justin to obey “the gods, and comply with the emperor’s edicts. He “defended the reasonableness of his religion. Upon “which the governor inquired in what kind of learning “and discipline he had been educated. He told him, “that he had endeavoured to understand all kinds of “discipline, and tried all methods of learning, but finding satisfaction in none of them, he at last had found “rest in the christian doctrine, however fashionable it “might be to despise it. Wretch! replies the indignant magistrate, art thou captivated then by that religion? I am, says Justin, I follow the christians, “and their doctrine is right. What is their doctrine? It is this, we believe the one only God to be “the Creator of all things visible and invisible, and

* Cave’s Life of Justin.

“confess our Lord Jesus Christ to be the Son of God;
 “foretold by the prophets of old, and who shall here-
 “after appear the Judge of mankind, a Saviour, teach-
 “er, and master to all those who are duly instructed by
 “him. As for myself, I am too mean to be able to
 “say any thing becoming his infinite Deity; this was
 “the business of the prophets, who many ages ago had
 “foretold the coming of the Son of God into the world.
 “Where do the christians usually assemble? The
 “God of the christians is not confined to any particular
 “place. In what place do you instruct your schol-
 “ars? Justin mentioned the place in which he dwelt,
 “and told him that there he explained christianity to all
 “who resorted to him. The prefect having severally
 “examined his companions, again addressed Justin.
 “Hear thou who hast the character of an orator, and
 “imaginest thyself to be in the possession of truth. If I
 “scourge thee from head to foot, thinkest thou that thou
 “shalt go to heaven? Although I suffer what you threat-
 “en, yet I expect to enjoy the portion of all true chris-
 “tians, as I know that the divine grace and favour is
 “laid up for all such, and shall be so, while the world
 “endures. Do you think that you shall go to heav-
 “en, and receive a reward? I not only think so, but
 “I know it, and have a certainty of it which excludes
 “all doubt. Rusticus insisted that they should all go
 “together, and sacrifice to the gods. No man whose
 “understanding is sound, replies Justin, will desert true
 “religion for the sake of error and impiety. Unless
 “you comply you shall be tormented without mercy.
 “We desire nothing more sincerely than to endure
 “tortures for our Lord Jesus Christ, and be saved.
 “Hence our happiness is promoted, and we shall have
 “confidence before the awful tribunal of our Lord and
 “Saviour, before which, by the divine appointment,
 “the whole world must appear. The rest assented,
 “despatch quickly your purpose, we are christians,
 “and cannot sacrifice to idols. The governor then
 “pronounced sentence, As to those who refuse to
 “sacrifice to the gods, and to obey the imperial

“edicts, let them be first scourged, and then beheaded according to the laws. The martyrs rejoiced and blessed God, and being led back to prison, were whipped and afterwards beheaded. The dead bodies were taken by christian friends, and decently interred.”

Thus slept in Jesus the christian philosopher Justin, about the year 163, and about the third or fourth year of the reign of Marcus. His Apologies and his Dialogue with Trypho have been mentioned already. Like many of the ancient fathers he appears to us under the greatest disadvantage. Works really his have been lost, and others ascribed to him, which are some of them not his, and others at least of ambiguous authority. He is the first christian since the apostles' days, who added to an unquestionable zeal and love for the gospel the character of a man of learning and philosophy. His early habits were retained, and yet were consecrated to the service of God. He, at least, should not be suspected of unreasonable impulses and fancies. His religion was doubtless the effect of serious and long deliberation, and the very best and most important use which a gentleman and a scholar can make of his rational faculties, to determine his choice in religion, was made by Justin. He examined the various philosophic sects, not merely for the purpose of amusement or ostentation, but to find out God, and in God true happiness. He tried and found them all wanting; he sought him in the gospel, he found him there, confessed him, gave up every thing for him, was satisfied with his choice, and died in serenity. His persevering in the profession of philosophy might probably have another view besides the gratification of his own taste. He might hope to conciliate the affections of philosophers, and allure them to christianity. The charity of his heart appears indeed to be great. He prayed for all men, he declined no dangers for the good of souls, he involved himself in disputes with philosophers for their benefit, to the extreme hazard of himself. His house was open for the instruction of all who consulted him; though he seems to have never assumed the ecclesias-

tical character. To draw gentlemen and persons of a liberal education to pay a regard to christianity, seems to have been his chief employment. But he found it easier to throw away his own life than to persuade one philosopher to become a christian. The danger of learned pride, the vanity of hoping to disarm the enmity of the wise of this world by the most charitable concessions, and the incurable prejudice of the great against the humble religion of Jesus, are much illustrated by his story. So is the victorious efficacy of divine grace, which singled out Justin from a race of men of all others the most opposite to Christ. We have seen a philosopher persecuted to death, informed against by one of his brethren, condemned by another, and suffering by the authority of an emperor, who gloried more in the philosophic than in the imperial name. A man of his learning and sagacity should not be supposed destitute of argument and system in his views. Men of sense will scarce think the ideas of such a person unworthy of their attention. Let us see then briefly what Justin thought in religion. I shall quote only from works undoubtedly his. We may possibly see that christian principles may be seriously maintained in consistence with the love of science and letters, and perhaps we may observe some degree of adulteration, which they received from passing through a channel of all others the most unfavourable for the conducting of their course, the channel of philosophy.

It is certain Justin worshipped Christ as the true God in the full and proper sense of the words. We have seen one testimony of it already in his examination before Rusticus. But let the reader hear his words. Trypho* the Jew finds fault with the christians on account of this very sentiment. "To me it appears," says he, "a paradox incapable of any sound proof, to say, that this Christ was God before all time, and that then he was made man, and suffered: and to assert that he was any thing more than a man, of men,

* Dialogue p. 63.

“appears not only paradoxical but foolish. I know,” answered Justin, “that it appears paradoxical, and particularly to those of your nation, who are determined neither to know nor do the will of God, but to follow the inventions of your teachers, as God declares of you. However if I could not demonstrate that he existed before all time, being God the Son of the Maker of the universe, and was made man of the Virgin, yet as this personage was shewn by every sort of proof to be the Christ of God, be the question as it may respecting his divinity and humanity, you have no right to deny that he is the Christ of God, even if he were only mere man; you could only say, that I was mistaken in my idea of his character. For there are some who call themselves christians, who confess him to be the Christ, but mere man only, with whom I agree not, nor most of those who bear that name, because we are commanded by Christ himself not to obey the precepts of men, but his own injunctions, and those of the holy prophets. Those, says Trypho, who say that he was man alone, and was in a particular manner anointed, and made Christ, appear to me to speak more rationally than you. For we all expect Christ a man, of men, that Elias will come to anoint him.” What we seem to be taught by the passage is this; that the general body of christians in the second century held the proper deity of Jesus Christ, that they believed that this was a part of Old Testament revelation, that they looked on a small number who held his mere humanity to be men who preferred human teachers to divine; and that in this they agree with the Jews, the most implacable enemies of christianity, who yet, abstracted from the question of the person of Christ, were inexcusable in denying his divine mission. The learned reader may judge for himself, by turning to the passage in Justin, whether it will bear the weight which I have laid on it. The testimony of a man so thoughtful, judicious, and honest as Justin, must be as decisive as that of any; and how far the passage may tend to determine the question

much agitated in our times, which relates to the opinion of the ancients concerning the person of Christ, may deserve consideration.

In another part of the same dialogue,* he speaks of Christ as the God of Israel who was with Moses, and shews what he meant when he said that true christians regarded what they were taught by the prophets. In his First Apology, he tells the emperor in what sense christians were atheists, they did not worship the gods commonly so called, but they† worshipped and adored the true God and his Son, and the prophetic Spirit, honouring them in word and in truth. Were those who call themselves Unitarians as candid and impartial as they profess, the controversy concerning the Trinity would be soon at an end. That the primitive christians worshipped one God alone, all who espouse the Trinity will grant to these persons. Let them with equal frankness acknowledge that they worshipped the one God in the three Persons just now mentioned, and then we have the Trinity in Unity. Why, if we were disposed to humble ourselves before divine Revelation as much as they were, should not we without further disputation do the same? Justin uses two terms usually expressive of that worship and adoration, which incommunicably belongs to the Deity. ‡

The all important doctrine of justification he states§ in the same manner as St. Paul does, believing that to press the necessity of Mosaic rites on others was to fall from the faith of Christ, and the learned reader may see more at large his views of regeneration and forgiveness of all past sins through Christ Jesus,|| and how extremely different his views were from that nominal christianity which contents so many.

He appears to have the clearest views of that special illumination, without which no man will understand and relish real godliness. His first unknown instructor

* Page 56. † Page 137. ‡ *σεβομεθα και Προσκυνουμεν.*
§ Dialogue 62. || First Apology 159, 160, and 68 Dialogue.

had taught him this, and he seems never to have forgotten it. He informs Trypho, that for their wickedness, God had hidden from the Jews the power of knowing divine wisdom, except a remnant, who according to the grace of his compassion were reserved, that their nation might not be like Sodom and Gomorrah. The eternal punishment of the wicked he avows so plainly, that I shall spare quotations upon it.

There seems however something in his train of thinking, which was the effect of his philosophic spirit, and produced notions not altogether agreeable to the spirit of the gospel, though his fundamentals were unquestionably sound. Thus toward the close of the Second Apology he declares that the doctrines of Plato were not heterogeneous to those of Christ, but only not altogether similar. And he seems to assert, that both he and the stoic and Pagan writers, both in prose and verse, saw something of truth from the portion of the seed of the divine word, which he makes to be the same as the Word the only begotten Son of God. The reader who is capable of consulting the last folio page of the Apology may judge for himself, whether he does not here confound together two things perfectly distinct, the light of natural conscience which God has given to all men, and the light of divine grace peculiar to the children of God. Certain it is, that St. Paul who speaks of both, in the Epistle to the Romans, always carefully distinguishes them, as of a kind entirely different from one another. He never allows unconverted men to have any portion at all of that light which is peculiarly christian. But thus it was that this excellent man seems to have forgotten the guard, which can scarce be too often repeated, against philosophy. We may see hereafter how mystics and heretics and platonizing christians jumbled these things together entirely, and what attempts were made by the philosophers to incorporate their *To ev* with the gospel. Justin seems unwarily to have given them some handle for this, and, if I mistake not, was the first sincere christian who was seduced by philosophy to adulterate the gos-

pel, though in a small degree. It should ever be remembered, that christian light stands single and unmixed, and will not bear to be kneaded into the same mass with other systems, religious or philosophical. And we seem to have marked the beginning of the decay of the first spiritual out-pouring among the Gentiles, through false wisdom; as long before, from the first council of Jerusalem, we marked its decay in the Jewish church through self-righteousness.

The same prejudice in favour of the instructor of his youth leads him to pay him an extraordinary compliment, as if he really knew the true God, and lost his life for attempting to draw men from idolatry. Whereas almost every line of the narrative left us by his disciples shews, that* he was as much an idolater as the rest of his countrymen. And the last words he uttered, it is well known, were entirely idolatrous. Justin had not learnt so fully as St. Paul would have taught him, that "the world by wisdom knew not God." In the last page of his Trypho there is also a phraseology extremely suspicious. He speaks of a self-determining power in man,† and uses much the same kind of reasoning on the subject of free will as has been fashionable since the days of Arminius. He seems to have been the first of all sincere christians, who introduced this foreign plant into christian ground. I shall call it foreign till any can prove its right to exist in the soil from scriptural evidence. That which renders it plain, that I do not mistake his meaning is, that he never explicitly owns the doctrine of election, though with happy inconsistency, like some other real christians, he involved it in his experience, and implies it in various parts of his works.

But the stranger once admitted was not easily expelled. The language of the church was silently and gradually changed, in this respect, from that more simple and scriptural mode of speaking used by Clement and Ignatius, who knew the election of grace, but not the

* Socrates.

† αὐτεξουσίαν.

self-determining power of the human will. We shall see hereafter the progress of the evil, and its arrival at full maturity under the fostering hand of Pelagius.



CHAPTER IV.

The Emperor Marcus Antoninus and his Persecution of the Christians.

HE succeeded Pius in the year 161, and appears very soon after to have commenced the persecution against the christians, in which Justin and his friends were slain. It excites a curiosity, not foreign from the design of this history, to see what could be the cause of so much enmity against a people, confessedly harmless, in a prince so considerate, humane, and in general well-intentioned as Marcus is allowed to be, and this too contrary to the example of his predecessor, whose memory he doubtless much revered, from whose intelligent and investigating spirit he must have derived ample information concerning the christians, and whom in all other matters of government he imitated so exactly. The case is this; Marcus Antoninus was all his reign, which continued nineteen years, an implacable persecutor of christians, and this not from mere ignorance of their moral character. He knew them, yet hated them, and shewed them no mercy. He allowed and encouraged the most barbarous treatment of their persons, and was yet himself a person of great humanity of temper, just and beneficent to the rest of mankind; free from all reproach in his general conduct, and in several parts of it a model worthy the imitation of christians.

I think it impossible to solve the phenomenon on any other principles than those by which the enmity of many philosophers of old, and of many devotees and exact moralists of modern times against the christian religion, is to be explained. The gospel is not only in its own nature distinct from careless and dissolute vice,

but also from the whole religion of philosophers, I mean of those who form to themselves a religion from natural and self devised sources, either in opposition to or with the neglect of the revealed word of God, and the influence of his Holy Spirit, applying that word to the heart of man. In all ages it will be found that the more strenuously men support such religion, the more vehemently do they hate christianity. Their religion is pride and self-importance, denies the fallen state of man, the provision and efficacy of grace, and the glory of God and the Redeemer. The enmity hence occasioned is obvious. It must be considered then that Marcus Antoninus was of the stoical sect, who carried self-sufficiency to the utmost pitch.

He fancied that he carried God within him. Like most of the philosophers he held the doctrine of the *To ev*, but he held it in all its detestable impiety and arrogance. With him to be good and virtuous was the easiest thing in the world; it was only to follow nature, and to obey the dictates of the deity, man's own soul, which was divine and self-sufficient. He could not with these views be humble, nor pray earnestly, nor feel his own internal wickedness and misery, nor bear the idea of a Saviour and Mediator. Had he contented himself with Pius to be a vulgar person in religion, the humanity of his nature, especially if aided by an equally sound understanding, (but of that I have some doubt) would probably have led him, like Pius, to have respected the excellent character and virtues of christians, and he would have felt it his duty to have protected such peaceable and deserving subjects. But the pride of philosophy seems to have been hurt. Whoever has attended to the spirit of his Twelve books of Meditations, and duly compared them with the doctrine of the gospel, must see them to be totally opposite, and will not wonder that christians felt from a serious stoic what might have been expected from a flagitious Nero. Pride and licentiousness are equally condemned by the gospel, and equally seek revenge. If this be a true state of the case, the philosophic spirit, stated as above, how-

ever differently modified in different ages, will always be inimical to the gospel, and the best of moralists will be found in union with the worst of villains on this subject. "Beware of philosophy," is a precept which as much calls for our attention now as ever.

Yet so fascinating is the power of prejudice and education, that many would look on it as a grievous crime to attempt to tear the laurels of virtue from the brows of Marcus Antoninus. Certainly however, had his virtue been genuine, or at all of a piece with that of the scriptures, he could never have treated christians, as we shall see he did.

Yet this is he whom Mr. Pope celebrates in those lines,

Who noble ends by noble means obtains,
Or failing, smiles in exile or in chains,
Like good Aurelius let him reign, or bleed
Like Socrates, that man is great indeed.*

Providence seems however to have determined, that those who, in contradiction to the feelings of human nature, dark and indigent as it is, and needing a heaven-imparted virtue, will yet proudly exalt their own sufficiency, shall be frustrated and put to shame. The latter of these men, with his last breath, gave a sanction to the most absurd idolatry, and the former did such deeds as I almost shudder to relate.

It is remarkable that Gataker, the editor of Antoninus' Meditations, represents himself as quite ashamed to behold the superior virtues of this prince, as described in his book, and speaks of himself in the most humiliating terms on this account. Not to insist on this obvious circumstance, that to say and to do are not the same things, and that there is no reason to apprehend that Marcus equalled in practice what he describes in theory, if a comparison were drawn between the author and his commentator with respect to humility, it would be much to the disadvantage of the former. I have not

* Some readers may perhaps need to be informed that Antoninus was also called Aurelius.

studied Marcus Aurelius with so much anxious care as to be assured, from an inspection of the work, that there appear no traces of this virtue in the emperor; but the general turn of the whole book leads me to conclude, that its writer felt no abasing thoughts of himself. In truth, no philosopher (I have already defined in what sense I call men philosophers) ever made such a confession of himself as Gataker does. Such is the effect of some knowledge of christianity on the human mind!

If we attend to the notices of history on the education and manners of Marcus, the account which has been given of his enmity against the gospel will be amply confirmed. Adrian had introduced him among the Salian priests when eight years old, and he became accurately versed in the rituals of his priesthood. At twelve he began to wear the philosopher's cloak; he practised austerities, lay on the bare ground, and was with difficulty persuaded by his mother to use a mattress and slight coverlet. He placed in his private chapel gold statues of his deceased masters, and visited their sepulchral monuments, and there offered sacrifices, and strewed flowers. So devoted was he to stoicism, that he attended the schools after he became emperor; and the faith which he put in dreams sufficiently proves his superstitious credulity. From a man so much lifted up by self-sufficiency, bigotry, and superstition, so illiberal a censure as this of the christians* is not matter of surprise. "This readiness (he is speaking of being resigned to the prospect of death) ought to proceed from a propriety of deliberate judgment, not from mere unintelligent obstinacy, as is the case of christians, but should be founded on grounds of solid reason, and with calm composure, without any tragical raptures, and in such a way as may induce others to admire and imitate." Had this emperor ever attended to the dying scenes of christians tortured to death by his orders, with any degree of candour and impartiality, he might have seen all these circumstances ex-

* 11th b. sect. 3d.

simplified in their deaths. Thousands of them have suffered with deliberate judgment, preferring heavenly things to earthly, having counted the cost, and made a reasonable decision, not uncertain (as he expresses himself) concerning a future life, calmly departing this life without any circumstances to justify the suspicion of pride or ostentation, and adorned with meekness, cheerfulness, and charity, which induced tens of thousands to examine what that hidden energy of christian life must be, which produces such exalted sentiments and such grandeur of spirit. And the power of prejudice was never more strongly exhibited than in this malignant sentence; which, in truth, is the more inexcusable, because he laboured under no involuntary ignorance of christians. For, besides the knowledge of them which he must have acquired under his predecessor, he had an opportunity of knowing them from various Apologies published in his reign. Justin's Second Apology we have seen was published; one sentence of which demonstrates, in how striking a manner our Saviour's prophecy was then fulfilled, A man's foes shall be they of his own household. Every where he observes, if a Gentile was reprov'd by a father or relation, he would revenge himself by informing against the reprover; in consequence of which he was liable to be dragged before the governor, and put to death. Tatian also, Athenagoras, Apollinaris bishop of Hierapolis, and Theophilus of Antioch, and Melito of Sardis published Apologies. This last published his about the year 177, of which some valuable remains are preserved in Eusebius. A part of his address to Marcus deserves to be quoted* on account of the justness of the sentiments, and the politeness with which they are delivered. "Pious persons aggrieved by new edicts published throughout Asia, and never before practised, now suffer persecution. For audacious sycophants, and men who covet other persons' goods, take advantage of these proclamations openly to rob and spoil

* B. 4. 25. c.

the innocent by night and by day. If this be done through your order, let it stand good; for a just emperor cannot act unjustly, and we will cheerfully carry away the honour of such a death; this only we humbly crave of your majesty, that, after an impartial examination of us and our accusers, you would justly decide whether we deserve death and punishment, or life and protection. But if these proceedings be not yours, and the new edicts be not the effects of your personal judgment, (edicts which ought not to be enacted against barbarian enemies) in that case we entreat you not to despise us, who are thus unjustly oppressed." He afterwards reminds him of the justice done to christians by his two immediate predecessors.

From this account it is evident that Marcus, by new edicts, commenced the persecution, and that it was carried on with merciless barbarity in those Asiatic regions which had been relieved by Pius. There is nothing pleasant that can be suggested to us by this view of things, but this circumstance, that the out-pouring of the Spirit of God still continued to produce its holy fruits in those highly favoured regions.

In the two next chapters I shall describe distinctly two scenes of this emperor's persecution. Nothing more in general concerning him remains to be mentioned, except the remarkable story of his danger and relief in the war of the Marcomanni.* He and his army being hemmed in by the enemy, were ready to perish with thirst; when suddenly a storm of thunder and lightning affrighted the enemies, whilst the rain refreshed the Romans. It is evident that the victory was obtained by a remarkable providential interposition. The christian soldiers in his army, we are sure, in their distress would pray to their God, even if Eusebius had not told us so. All christian writers speak of the relief as vouchsafed in answer to their prayers, and no real christian will doubt of the soundness of their judg-

* Euseb. b. 5. ch. 5.

ment in this point. I have only to add, that Marcus, in a manner agreeable to his usual superstition, ascribed his deliverance to his gods. Each party judged according to their views, and those moderns who ascribe the whole to the ordinary powers of nature, judge also according to their usual skepticism. Whether the divine interposition deserves to be called a miracle or not, is a question rather concerning propriety of language than religion. This seems to me all that is needful to be said on a fact which on one side has been magnified beyond all bounds, and on the other has been reduced to mere insignificancy. It happened in the year 174. He lived five years after this, as far as appears, a persecutor to the last.

CHAPTER V.

Martyrdom of Polycarp.

THE year 167, the sixth of Marcus, Smyrna was distinguished by the martyrdom of her bishop Polycarp.

The reader has heard of him before in the account of Ignatius. He had succeeded Bucolus, a vigilant and industrious bishop, in the charge of Smyrna. The apostles, and we may apprehend St. John particularly, ordained him to this office. He had been familiarly conversant with the apostles, and received the government of the church from those who had been eye-witnesses and ministers of our Lord, and continually taught that which he had been taught by them.* Usher, in his Prolegom. to Ignatius, has laboured to shew† that he was the angel of the church of Smyrna addressed by our Saviour. If he is not mistaken in this, the character of Polycarp is delineated by a hand indeed divine, and the martyrdom before us was particularly predicted.

* Euseb. 4. ch. 14.

† Cave's Life of Polycarp.

He must indeed have presided seventy-four years over that church by this account ; but we shall hereafter see that his age must have been extremely great. He certainly long survived his friend Ignatius, and was reserved to suffer by Marcus Antoninus. Sometime before this he came to Rome to hold a conference with Anicetus, the bishop of that See, concerning the time of observing Easter. The matter was soon decided between them, as all matters should be which enter not into the essence of godliness. They each observed their own customs without any breach of charity between them, real or apparent. But he found more important employment while at Rome. The heresy of Marcion was strong in that city ; and the testimony and zealous labours of one who had known so much of the apostles were successfully employed against it, and many were reclaimed. It was not in Marcion's power to undermine the authority of this venerable Asiatic. To procure a seeming coalition was the utmost he could expect, and it was as suitable to his views to attempt this, as it was to those of Polycarp to oppose. Meeting him one day in the street, he called out to him, " Polycarp, own us." " I do own thee," says the zealous bishop, " to be the first-born of Satan." I shall refer the reader to what has been said already of St. John's similar conduct on such occasions, adding only that Irenæus, from whom Eusebius relates the story, commends his conduct, and speaks of it as commonly practised by the apostles and their followers. Irenæus informs us* that he had a particular delight in recounting what had been told by those who had seen Christ in the flesh, that he used to relate what he had been informed concerning his doctrine and miracles, and when he heard of any heretical attempts to overturn christian fundamentals, he would cry out, To what times, O God, hast thou reserved me ! and would leave the place.

Indeed when it is considered what Marcion maintained, and what unquestionable evidence Polycarp had

* Irenæus Epistle to Florin.

against him in point of matter of fact, we shall see he had just reason to testify his diapprobation. The man was one of the Docetæ; with him Christ had no real manhood at all. He rejected the whole Old Testament, and mutilated the New. He held two principles, after the manner of the Manichees, in order to account for the origin of evil. If men who assert things so fundamentally subversive of the gospel, would openly disavow the christian name, they might be endured with much more composure by christians, nor would there be any call for so scrupulous an absence from their society, as St. Paul has determined the case.* But for such men, whether ancient or modern, to call themselves christians, is an intolerable insult on the common sense of mankind. We know nothing more of the life of this great man. Of the circumstances of his death, we have an account, and they deserve a copious relation.

The greatest part of the ancient narrative is preserved by Eusebius.† The beginning and the end, which he has not given us, have been restored by the care of archbishop Usher. It is an Epistle written in the name of Polycarp's church of Smyrna: I have ventured to translate the whole myself, yet not without examining what Valesius, the editor of Eusebius, and archbishop Wake, have left us on the subject. It is doubtless one of the most precious ornaments of antiquity, and it seemed to deserve also some notes and illustrations.

"The church of God which sojourns at Smyrna, to that which sojourns at Philomelium,‡ and in all places where the holy catholic church sojourns throughout the world, may the mercy, peace, and love of God the Father, and of the Lord Jesus Christ, be multiplied! We have written to you, brethren, as well concerning the other martyrs, as particularly the blessed Polycarp, who, as it were, sealing by his testimony, closed the persecution. For all these things

* 1 Cor. 5. x. † B. 4. Euseb. hist. ch. xv.

‡ A city of Lycaonia. I thought it right to give the English reader the original idea of sojourning. It was the usual language and the spirit too of the church at that time.

which were done were so conducted, that the Lord from above might exhibit to us the nature of a martyrdom perfectly evangelical. For Polycarp did not precipitately give himself up to death, but waited till he was apprehended, as our Lord himself did, that we might imitate him; not only caring for ourselves, but also for our neighbours. It is the office of solid and genuine charity not only to desire our own salvation, but also that of all the brethren.* Blessed and noble indeed are all martyrdoms, which are regulated according to the will of God. For it behoves us who assume to ourselves the character of christians, a name professing distinguished sanctity, to submit to God alone the arbitration of all wants.† Doubtless their magnanimity, their patience, their love of the Lord, deserve the admiration of every one; who though torn with whips till the frame and structure of their bodies was laid open even to their veins and arteries, yet meekly endured; so that those who stood around pitied them and lamented. But such was their fortitude, that none uttered a sigh or groan, evincing to us all that at that hour the martyrs of Christ, though tormented, were absent, as it were, from the body, or rather that the Lord being present, conversed familiarly with them; and they, supported by the grace of Christ, despised the torments of this world, by one hour redeeming themselves from eternal punishment. And the fire of savage tormentors was cold to them. For they had steadily in view a desire to avoid that fire which is eternal and never to be quenched. And with the eyes of their heart they had

* I translate according to the Greek. But though common candour may put a favourable construction on the expressions, the honour then put on martyrdom seems excessive.

† They doubtless mean to censure the self-will of those who threw themselves on their persecutors before they were providentially called to it. And doubtless the calm patience of Polycarp, in this respect, much excelled the impetuosity of Ignatius. But Polycarp was much older than he was when Ignatius suffered, and very probably had grown in grace. And the Asiatic churches seem to have corrected the errors of excessive zeal, which even in their best christians had formerly prevailed. The case of Quintus will soon throw a light on this subject.

respect to the good things reserved for those who endure, *things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.* But they were then exhibited to them by the Lord, being indeed no longer men, but angels. In like manner those who were condemned to the wild beasts underwent for a time cruel torments, being placed under shells of sea-fish, and exposed to various other tortures, that if possible the infernal tyrant, by an uninterrupted series of suffering, might tempt them to deny their Master. Much did Satan contrive against them;* but, thanks to God, without effect against them all. The magnanimous Germanicus, by his patience, strengthened the weak, who fought with wild beasts in an illustrious manner; for the proconsul, desirous of persuading him, and telling him to pity his age, he drew the wild beasts to himself by provocations, desirous of departing more quickly from a world of wickedness. And now the whole multitude, admiring the fortitude of christians, the true friends and worshippers of God, cried out, Take away the atheists,† let Polycarp be sought for. One, by name Quintus, lately come from Phrygia, his native country, on sight of the beasts, trembled. He had persuaded some persons to present themselves before the tribunal of their own accord. Him the proconsul, by soothing speeches, induced to swear and to sacrifice. On this account, brethren, we do not approve of those who offer themselves to martyrdom; for we have not so learned Christ.

“The admirable Polycarp, when he heard what passed, was quite unmoved, and desired to remain in the city. But, induced by the intreaties of his people, he retired to a village not far from the city; and spent the time with a few friends, night and day, in nothing else than in praying for all the churches in the

* The language of these ancient christians deserves to be noticed; they have their eye more steadily on a divine influence on the one hand, and a diabolical one on the other, than is fashionable in our times.

† The term of reproach then commonly affixed to christians.

world, according to his usual custom. Three days before he was seized he had a vision while he was praying. He saw his pillow consumed by fire, and turning to the company he said prophetically, I must be burnt alive. Those who sought him being at hand, he retired to another village ; and immediately the officers came to the house, and not finding him, they seized two servants, one of whom was induced, by torture, to confess the place of his retreat. Certainly it was impossible to conceal him, since even those of his own household discovered him. And the tetrarch, called Cleronomus Herod, hastened to introduce him into the stadium, that so he might obtain his lot as a partaker of Christ, and those who betrayed him might share with Judas. Taking then the servant as their guide, they went out about supper-time, with their usual arms, as against a robber, and arriving late, they found him lying in an upper room at the end of the house, whence he might have made his escape,* but he would not, saying, The will of the Lord be done. Hearing that they were arrived, he came down and conversed with them, those who were present admiring his age and constancy ; some said, was it worth while to take pains to apprehend so aged a person ? He immediately ordered meat and drink to be set before them, as much as they pleased, and begged them to allow him one hour to pray without molestation ; which being granted, he prayed standing, full of the grace of God, so that he could not be silent for two hours ; and the hearers were astonished, and many of them repented that they were come to seize so divine a character.

“ When he had ceased praying, having made mention of all whom he had ever known, small and great, noble and vulgar, and of the whole catholic church through the world, the hour of departing being come, they set him on an ass and led him to the city.† The

* Those who know the eastern custom of flat-roofed houses, will not be surprised at this.

† I have not thought it worth while to translate what relates to the

irenarch Herod and his father Nicetes met him, who taking him up into their chariot, began to advise him, asking, What harm is it to say, lord Cæsar, and to sacrifice, and be safe? At first he was silent, but being pressed, he said, I will not follow your advice. When they could not persuade him, they treated him abusively, and thrust him out of the chariot, so that in falling he bruised his thigh. But he, still unmoved as if he had suffered nothing, went on cheerfully under the conduct of his guards to the stadium. There the tumult being so great that few could hear any thing, a voice from heaven said to Polycarp, entering on the stadium,* Be strong Polycarp, and play the man. None saw the speaker, but many of us heard the voice.

“When he was brought to the tribunal, there was a great tumult, as soon as it was generally understood that Polycarp was apprehended. The proconsul asked him, if he was Polycarp, to which he assented. The other began to advise him, pity thy great age, and the like. Swear by the fortune of Cæsar; repent, say, Take away the atheists. Polycarp, with a grave aspect, beholding all the multitude, waving his hand to them, and looking up to heaven, said, Take away the atheists. The proconsul urging him, and saying, Swear, and I will release thee, reproach Christ. Polycarp said, Eighty and six years have I served him, and he hath never wronged me, and how can I blaspheme my King who hath saved me! The other still urging, Swear by the fortune of Cæsar, Polycarp said, If you still vainly contend to make me swear by the fortune of Cæsar, as you speak, affecting an ignorance of my real character, hear me frankly declaring what am. I am a christian; and if you desire to learn the christian doctrine, assign me a day, and hear. The proconsul said, Persuade the people. Polycarp said, I have thought proper to address you: for we

time when Polycarp suffered, in which the learned disagree in the mode of interpretation.

* The reader should remember that miraculous interpositions of various kinds were still frequent in the church.

are taught to pay all honour to magistracies and powers appointed by God, which is consistent with a good conscience. But I do not hold them worthy to apologize before them.* I have wild beasts, says the proconsul. I will expose you to them, unless you repent. Call them replies the martyr. Our minds are not to be changed from the better to the worse: but it is a good thing to be changed from evil to good. I will tame your spirit by fire, says the other, since you despise the wild beasts, unless you repent. You threaten me with fire, answers Polycarp, which burns for a moment, and will be soon extinct; but are ignorant of the future judgment, and the fire of eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly. But why do you delay? Do what you please. Saying this and more, he was filled with confidence and joy, and grace shone in his countenance; so that he was so far from being confounded by the menaces, that on the contrary the proconsul was visibly embarrassed; he sent, however, the herald to proclaim thrice, in the midst of the assembly, Polycarp hath professed himself a christian. Upon this all the multitude, both of Gentiles and of Jews, who dwelt at Smyrna, with insatiable rage shouted aloud, This is the doctor of Asia, the father of christians, the subverter of our gods, who hath taught many not to sacrifice nor to adore. They now begged Philip, the asiarch, to let out a lion against Polycarp. But he refused, observing that the amphitheatrical spectacles of the wild beasts were finished. They then unanimously shouted, that he should be burnt alive; for his vision was of necessity to be accomplished. Whilst he was praying he observed the fire kindling, and turning to the faithful that were with him, he said prophetically, I must be burnt alive; the work was executed with all possible speed: the people immediately gathered fuel from the workshops and baths, in which employment

* I cannot think that this was said in contempt of the vulgar, but on account of the prejudice and enmity which their conduct exhibited at that time.

the Jews* distinguished themselves with their usual malice. As soon as the fire was prepared, stripping off his clothes, and loosing his girdle, he attempted to take off his shoes, a thing unusual to him before, because each of the faithful were wont to strive who should be most assiduous in serving him. For before his martyrdom his integrity and blameless conduct had always procured him the most unfeigned respect. Immediately the usual appendages of burning were placed about him. And when they were going to fasten him to the stake, he said, Let me remain as I am; for He who giveth me strength to sustain the fire, will enable me also, without your securing me with nails, to remain unmoved in the fire. Upon which they bound him without nailing him. And he, putting his hands behind him, and being bound as a distinguished ram selected from a great flock, a burnt-offering acceptable to God Almighty, said, O Father of thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have attained the knowledge of thee, O God of angels and principalities, and of all creation, and of all the just who live in thy sight, I bless thee, that thou hast counted me worthy of this day, and this hour, to receive my portion in the number of martyrs, in the cup of Christ, for the resurrection to eternal life both of soul and body, in the incorruption of the Holy Ghost; among whom may I be received before thee this day as a sacrifice well savoured and acceptable, as thou the faithful and true God hast prepared, declaring beforehand, and fulfilling accordingly. Wherefore I praise thee for all those things, I bless thee, I glorify thee, by the eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, thy well-beloved Son: through whom, with him in the Holy Spirit, be glory to thee both now and for ever. *Amen.*

* I scarce know a more striking view of the judicial curse inflicted on the Jews than this. Indeed this people all along exerted themselves in persecution, and Justin Martyr tells us of a charge which had been sent from Jerusalem by the chief priests against christians directed to their brethren through the world.

And when he had pronounced Amen aloud, and finished prayer, the officers lighted the fire. And a great flame bursting out, we, to whom it was given to see, saw a wonder, who also were reserved to relate to others that which happened. For the flame forming the appearance of an arch, as the sail of a vessel filled with wind, was as a wall round about the body of the martyr. And it was in the midst, not as burning flesh, but as gold and silver refined in a furnace. We received also in our nostrils such a fragrance, as of frankincense, or some other precious perfume. At length the impious observing that his body could not be consumed by the fire, ordered the confector* to approach, and to plunge his sword into his body. Upon this a quantity of blood gushed out, so that the fire was extinguished and all the multitude were astonished to see the difference thus providentially made between the unbelievers and the elect; of whom the admirable personage before us was doubtless one, in our age an apostolical and prophetic teacher, the bishop of the catholic church of Smyrna. For whatever he declared was fulfilled, and will be fulfilled. But the envious, malignant, and spiteful enemy of the just, observing the honour put on his martyrdom, and his blameless life, and knowing that he was now crowned with immortality, and the prize of unquestionable victory, studied to prevent us from obtaining his body, though many of us longed to do it, and to communicate† with his sacred flesh. For some suggested to Nicetes, the father of Herod, and the brother of Alce,‡ to go to the proconsul, and intreat him not to deliver them the body, lest, say they, leaving the Crucified One, they should begin to worship him. And they said

* An officer whose business it was in the Roman games to despatch any beast that was unruly or dangerous.

† I see no ground for the well known papistical inference from hence of the virtues ascribed to relics. To express an affectionate regard to the deceased by a decent attention to the funeral rites, is all that is necessarily meant by the expression.

‡ Alce is spoken of with honour in Ignatius' Epistle to the Smyrneans. She, it seems, had found, in her nearest relations, inveterate foes to whatever she held dear.

these things upon the suggestions and arguments of the Jews, who also watched us, when we were going to take his body from the pile; unacquainted indeed with our views, that it is not possible for us to forsake Christ, who suffered for the salvation of all who are saved of the human race, nor ever to worship any other.* For we adore him as being the Son of God; but we justly love the martyrs as disciples of the Lord, and followers of him, on account of that distinguished affection which they bore towards their King and their Teacher, and may we be ranked at last in their number! The centurion, perceiving the malevolence of the Jews, placed the body in the midst, and burnt it. Then we gathered up his bones, more precious than gold and jewels, and deposited them in a proper place; where, if it be possible, we shall meet, and the Lord will grant us, in gladness and joy, to celebrate the birth-day of his martyrdom, both in commemoration of those who have wrestled before us, and for the instruction and confirmation of those who come after.† Thus far concerning the blessed Polycarp. Eleven brethren from Philadelphia suffered with him, but he alone is particularly celebrated by all; even by Gentiles he is spoken of in every place. He was, in truth, not only an illustrious teacher, but also an eminent martyr, whose martyrdom all desire to imitate, because it was regulated exactly by evangelical principles. For by patience he conquered the unjust magistrate, and thus receiving the crown of immortality, exulting with apostles and all the righteous, he glorifies God, even the Father, and blesses our Lord, even the Ruler of our bodies, and the Shepherd of his church dispersed through the world. You desired a full account; and we, for the present, have sent you a compendious one by our brother Mark. When you have read it, send

* The faith of Christ, and a just honour paid to true christians, abstracted from superstition and idolatry, appear in this passage.

† If we were in our times subject to such sufferings, I suspect these anniversary-martyrdoms of antiquity might be thought useful to us also. The superstition of after times appears not, I think, in this Epistle.

it to the brethren beyond you, that they also may glorify the Lord, who makes selections from his own servants, who shall thus honour him by their deaths, and who not. To him who is able to conduct us all by his grace and free mercy into his heavenly kingdom, by his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, to him be glory, honour, power, majesty, for ever. *Amen.* Salute all the saints; those with us salute you, particularly Evaristus the writer, with all his house. He suffered martyrdom the second day of the month Xanthicus, the seventh day before the calends of March, on the great Sabbath, the eighth hour. He was apprehended by Herod, under Philip the Trallian pontifex, Statius Quadratus being proconsul, but Jesus Christ reigning for ever, to whom be glory, honour, majesty, an eternal throne from age to age. We pray that you may be strong, brethren, walking in the word Jesus Christ, according to the gospel, with whom be glory to God, even the Father, and to the Holy Spirit, for the salvation of his elected saints, among whom the blessed Polycarp hath suffered martyrdom, with whom may we be found in the kingdom of Jesus Christ, having followed his steps!

These things Caius hath transcribed from the copy of Irenæus, the disciple of Polycarp, who also lived with Irenæus. And I Socrates of Corinth have transcribed from the copy of Caius. Grace be with you all. And I Pionius have transcribed from the fore-mentioned, having made search for it, and received the knowledge of it by a vision of Polycarp, as I shall shew in what follows, collecting it when now almost obsolete. So may the Lord Jesus Christ collect me with his elect, to whom be glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit to the ages of ages. *Amen."*

I thought it not amiss for the English reader to see the manner in which books were then successively preserved in the church. Of Irenæus we shall hear more hereafter. Nor ought Pionius' account of his vision to be hastily slighted, by those who consider the scarcity of useful writings in those days. Whether the case was worthy of such a divine interposition, we, who indo-

lently enjoy books without end, can scarce be judges. However, if any choose to add this to the number of pious frauds, which certainly did once much abound, the authenticity of the whole account remains unimpeached, as very near the whole is in Eusebius. This historian mentions Metrodorus, a presbyter of the sect of Marcion, who perished in the flames among others who suffered at Smyrna. It cannot be denied that heretics also have had their martyrs. Pride and obstinacy will in some minds persist even to death. But as all who have been classed among heretics have not been so in reality, Metrodorus might be a very different sort of a man from Marcion.

A comparative view of a christian suffering, as we have seen Polycarp, with a Roman stoic or untutored Indian undergoing afflictions, where we have an opportunity to survey all circumstances, might shew, in a practical light, the peculiar genius and spirit of christianity, and its divine superiority. At the same time those who now content themselves with a cold rationality in religion, may ask themselves how it would have fitted them to endure what Polycarp did, and whether something of what is falsely called enthusiasm, and which the foregoing Epistle breathes so profusely, be not really and solidly divine.

CHAPTER VI.

The Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne.

THE flame* of Antoninus' persecution reached a country which hitherto has afforded us no ecclesiastical materials, I mean that of France, in those times called Gallia. Two neighbouring cities, Vienne and Lyons, appear to have been much favoured with evangelical light and love. Vienne was an ancient Roman colony; Lyons was more modern, and her present bishop was Pothinus.

* Euseb. iv. 1 c.

His very name points him out to be a Grecian. Irenæus was a presbyter of Lyons, and seems to have been the author of the Epistle which Eusebius has preserved, and which the reader shall see presently. Other names concerned in the subject are evidently of Greek extraction, and it is hence most probable that some Asiatic Greeks had been the founders of these churches. Whoever casts his eye on a map of France, and sees the situation of Lyons, at present the largest and most populous city in that kingdom, next to Paris, may observe how favourable the confluence of the Rhine and the Soane, (anciently called the Arar) on which it stands, is for the purposes of commerce.* The navigation of the Mediterranean, in all probability, was conducted by merchants of Lyons and of Smyrna, and hence the easy introduction of the gospel from the latter place and the other Asiatic churches is apparent. How much God had blessed the work in France, the accounts of their sufferings will evince. Lyons and Vienne appear to be daughters, of whom their Asiatic mothers needed not to be ashamed.

The Epistle of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons to the Brethren in Asia and Phrygia.†

“The servants of Christ, sojourning in Vienne and Lyons in France, to the brethren in Asia Propria and Phrygia, who have the same faith and hope of redemption with us, peace, and grace, and glory from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

We are not competent to describe with accuracy, nor is it in our power to express the greatness of the affliction sustained here by the saints, the intense animosity of the heathen against them, and the complicated sufferings of the blessed martyrs. The grand enemy assault-

* When will the moderns learn to connect navigation and commerce with the propagation of the gospel?

† Eusebius does not give the whole of the Epistle at length, but omits some parts and interrupts the thread of the narrative. It is not necessary to notice the particular instances.

ed us with all his might, and by his first essays exhibited intentions of exercising malice without limits and without controul. He left no method untried to habituate his slaves to his bloody work, and to prepare them by previous exercises against the servants of God. Christians were absolutely prohibited from appearing in any houses, except their own, in baths, in the market, or in any place whatever. The grace of God, however, fought for us, preserving the weak and exposing the strong, who like pillars, were able to withstand him in patience, and to draw the whole fury of the wicked against themselves. These entered into the contest, sustaining every species of pain and reproach. What was heavy to others, to them was light, while they were hastening to Christ, evincing indeed, that *the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us*. The first trial was from the people at large; shouts, blows, the dragging of their bodies, the plundering of their goods, casting of stones, and the confining them within their own houses, and all the indignities which may be expected from a fierce and outrageous multitude, these were magnanimously sustained. And now, being led into the forum by the tribune and the magistrates, they were examined before all the people, whether they were christians, and, on pleading guilty, were shut up in prison till the arrival of the governor.* Before him they were at length brought, and he treated us with great savageness of manners. The spirit of Vettius Epagathus, one of the brethren, was roused, a man full of charity both to God and man, whose conduct was so exemplary, though but a youth, that he might justly be compared to old Zacharias; for he walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless, a man ever unwearied in acts of beneficence to his neighbours, full of zeal towards God, and fervent

* It is probable, but not quite certain, that this governor was Severus, afterwards emperor. The conduct of this governor was worthy of so inhuman a prince.

in spirit. He could not bear to see so manifest a perversion of justice ; but, being moved with indignation, he demanded to be heard in behalf of the brethren, and pledged himself to prove that there was nothing atheistic or impious among them, those about the tribunal shouting against him, for he was a man of quality, and the governor being impatient of so equitable a demand, and only asking him if he were a christian, and he confessing in the most open manner, the consequence was, that he was ranked among the martyrs. He was called, indeed the advocate of the christians ; but he had an advocate* within, the Holy Spirit more abundantly than Zacharias, which he demonstrated by the fulness of his charity, cheerfully laying down his life in defence of his brethren ; for he was, and is still, a genuine disciple of Christ, following the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.† The rest began now to be distinguished. The capital martyrs appeared indeed ready for the contest, and discharged their part with all alacrity of mind. Others appeared also unready, unexercised, and as yet weak, unable to sustain the shock of such a contest : of these ten in number lapsed, whose case filled us with great grief and unmeasurable sorrow, and dejected the spirits of those who had not yet been apprehended, who, though they sustained all indignities, yet deserted not the martyrs in their distress. Then we were all much alarmed, because of the uncertain event of confession, not that we dreaded the torments with which we were threatened, but because we looked forward unto the end, and feared the danger of apostacy. Persons were now apprehended daily of such as were counted worthy to fill up the number of the lapsed, so that the most excellent were selected from the two

* It is not easy to translate this, because of the ambiguous use of the term Παράκλητον, which signifies both a comforter and an advocate. Besides their only advocate in heaven, Jesus Christ, christians have the comfort and power of his Spirit within.

† Every man who reads this must see the iniquity and absurdity of the governor. A term of reproach stands in the room of argument. The name christian has long ceased to be infamous. But the words Lollard, Puritan, Pictist, and Methodist have supplied its place.

churches, even those by whose labour they had been founded and established.* There were seized at the same time some of our heathen servants, (for the governor had openly ordered us all to be sought for) who, by the impulse of Satan, fearing the torments which they saw inflicted on the saints, on the suggestion of the soldiers, accused us of eating human flesh, and of unnatural mixtures, and of things not fit even to be mentioned or imagined, and such as ought not to be believed of mankind.† These things being divulged, all were incensed even to madness against us; so that if some were formerly more moderate on account of any connexions of blood, affinity, or friendship, they were then transported beyond all bounds with indignation. Now it was that our Lord's word was fulfilled, "*The time will come when whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.*" ‡ The holy martyrs now sustained tortures which exceed the powers of description; Satan labouring, by means of them, to extort something slanderous to christianity. The whole fury of the multitude, the governor, and the soldiers, was spent in a particular manner on Sanctus of Vienne, the deacon, and on Maturus, a late convert indeed, but a magnanimous wrestler, and on Attalus of Pergamus, a man who had ever been the pillar and support of our church,§ and on Blandina, through whom Christ shewed, that those things, that appear unsightly and contemptible among men, are most honourable in the presence of God, on account of love to his name, exhibited in real energy, and not boasting in pompous pretences. For while we all feared, and among the rest her mistress, according to the flesh, herself one of the noble army of martyrs, was afraid

* Hence I judge that their churches were of no great antiquity.

† Here we see again the usual charge of unnatural crimes objected to the christians, believed in the paroxysm of the persecution, but afterwards generally disclaimed by sober persons.

‡ Surely they needed much the aid of the Heavenly Comforter, promised in those discourses, to enable them to sustain the load of calumny so injurious and distressing.

§ A farther confirmation of the idea that the gospel had been brought into France by the charitable zeal of the Asiatic christians.

that she would not be able to witness a good confession, because of the weakness of her body, Blandina was endowed with so much fortitude, that those who successively tortured her from morning to night, were quite worn out with fatigue, and owned themselves conquered and exhausted of their whole apparatus of tortures, and were amazed to see her still breathing, whilst her body was torn and laid open, and confessed that one species of torture had been sufficient to despatch her, much more so great a variety as had been applied. But the blessed woman, as a generous wrestler, recovered fresh vigour in the act of confession; and it was an evident refreshment, support, and an annihilation of all her pains to say "*I am a christian and no evil is committed among us.*"

In the mean time Sanctus having sustained, in a manner more than human, the most barbarous indignities, while the impious hoped to extort from him something injurious to the gospel, from the duration and intenseness of his sufferings, resisted with so much firmness, that he would neither tell his own name, nor that of his nation or state, nor whether he was a freeman or a slave; but to every interrogatory he answered in Latin, "*I am a christian.*" This he repeatedly owned was to him both name, and state, and race, and every thing, and nothing else could the heathen draw from him. Hence the indignation of the governor and the torturers was fiercely levelled against him, so that having exhausted all the usual methods of torture, they at last fixed brazen plates to the most tender parts of his body. These were scorched of course, and yet he remained upright and inflexible, firm in his confession, being bedewed and refreshed by the heavenly fountain of the water of life which flows from the belly of Christ.* His body witnessed indeed the ghastly tortures which he had sustained, being one continued wound and

* An illustrious testimony to the doctrine of the Spirit's influences, now so much depreciated, but which was then the support of suffering christians. The allusion is to John, 7th chapter, "He that believeth on me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. And this spake he of the Spirit."

bruise, altogether contracted, and no longer retaining the form of a human creature ; in whom Christ suffering wrought great marvels, confounding the adversary, and shewing, for the encouragement of the rest, that nothing is to be feared where the love of the Father is ; nothing painful where the glory of Christ is exhibited. For while the impious imagined, when after some days they renewed his tortures, that a fresh application of the same methods of punishment to his wounds, now swollen and inflamed, must either overcome his constancy, or, by despatching him on the spot, strike a terror into the rest, as he could not even bear to be touched by the hand, this was so far from being the case, that contrary to all expectation, his body recovered its natural position in the second course of torture ; he was restored to his former shape and the use of his limbs ; so that, by the grace of Christ, it proved not a punishment, but a cure.

One of those who had denied Christ was Biblias. The devil, imagining that he had now devoured her, and desirous to augment her condemnation, by inducing her to accuse the christians falsely, led her to the torture, compelling her to charge us with horrid impieties, as being a weak and timorous creature. But in her torture she recovered herself, and awoke as out of a deep sleep, being admonished by a temporary punishment of the danger of eternal fire in hell ; and in opposition to the impious, she said, How can we eat infants, to whom it is not lawful to eat the blood of beasts ?* And now she professed herself a christian, and was added to the army of martyrs. The power of Christ exerted in the patience of his people, had now exhausted the usual artifices of torment, and the devil was driven to new resources. They were thrust into the darkest and most noisome parts of the prison ; their feet were distended in a wooden trunk even to the fifth hole, and

* Hence it appears that the eating of blood was not practised among the christians of Lyons ; and that they understood not christian liberty in this point, will not be wondered at by those who consider the circumstances of the first christians.

in this situation they suffered all the indignities which diabolical malice could inflict. Hence many of them were suffocated in prison, whom the Lord, shewing forth his own glory, was pleased thus to take to himself. The rest, though afflicted to such a degree, as to seem scarce capable of recovery under the kindest treatment, destitute as they were of all help and support, yet remained alive, strengthened by the Lord, and confirmed both in body and mind, encouraging and comforting the rest.

Some young persons who had been lately seized, and whose bodies had been unexercised with sufferings, unequal to the severity of the confinement, expired. The blessed Pothinus, bishop of Lyons, upwards of ninety years of age, and very infirm and asthmatic, yet strong in spirit, and panting after martyrdom, was dragged before the tribunal; his body worn out indeed with age and disease, yet he retained a soul through which Christ might triumph. Being borne by the soldiers to the tribunal, and attended by the magistrates and all the multitude, shouting against him as if he were Christ himself, he made a good confession. Being asked by the governor, who was the God of the christians, he answered, if you be worthy, you shall know. He was then unmercifully haled about, and suffered variety of ill treatment; those who were near insulting him with hands and feet, without the least respect to his age; and those at a distance throwing at him whatever came to hand, every one looking upon himself as an offender, if he did not insult him some way or other. For thus they imagined they revenged the cause of their gods; and, scarce breathing, he was thrown into prison, and after two days expired.

And here appeared a remarkable dispensation of Providence, and the immense compassion of Jesus, rarely exhibited indeed among the brethren, but not foreign to the character of Christ. For those who when first apprehended had denied, were themselves shut up in prison and suffered dreadful severities, as this denial of Christ availed them not. But those who

confessed what they were, were imprisoned as christians, abstracted from any other charge. These, as murderers and incestuous wretches, were punished much more than the rest; for the joy of martyrdom supported the latter, and the hope of the promises, and the love of Christ, and the spirit of the Father. The former were oppressed with the pangs of guilt; so that, while they were dragged along, their very countenances distinguished them from the rest: For the faithful proceeded with cheerful steps; their countenances shining with much grace and glory; their bonds were as the most beautiful ornaments, and they looked as a bride adorned with her richest array, breathing the fragrance of Christ so much, that some thought they had been literally perfumed. But the others went on dejected, spiritless, and forlorn, and in every way disgraced, even insulted by the heathen as cowards and poltroons, and treated as murderers, and having lost the precious, the glorious, the soul-reviving appellation. The rest observing these things, were confirmed in the faith, confessed without hesitation on their being apprehended, nor admitted the diabolical suggestion for a moment.

The martyrs were put to death in various ways: weaving a chaplet of various odours and flowers, they presented it to the Father. In truth, it became the wisdom and goodness of God to appoint that his servants, after enduring a great and variegated contest, should as victors receive the great crown of immortality. Maturus, Sanctus, Blandina, and Attalus, were led to the wild beasts into the amphitheatre, to the common spectacle of Gentile inhumanity.

One day of the shews being afforded to the people extraordinary on our account, Maturus and Sanctus again underwent various tortures in the amphitheatre, as if they had suffered nothing before. Thus were they treated like those wrestlers who, having conquered several times already, were obliged afresh to contend with other conquerors by fresh lots, till some one was conqueror of the whole number, and as such was crown-

ed;* here they sustained again the blows usually inflicted on those who were condemned to wild beasts, as they were led to the amphitheatre; they were exposed to be dragged and torn by the beasts, and to all the barbarities which the mad populace with shouts exacted, and above all to the iron chair, by which their bodies being roasted, emitted a disagreeable smell. Nor was this all; the persecutors raged still more, if possible, to overcome their patience. But not a word could be extorted from Sanctus, besides what he first had uttered, the word of confession. These then remaining alive a long time, expired at length, being made a spectacle to the world, equivalent to all the variety usual in the fights of gladiators.

Blandina, suspended to a stake, was exposed as food to the wild beasts; who, because she was seen suspended in the form of a cross, employed in vehement supplication, inspired the combatants with much alacrity, while they beheld with their bodily eyes, in the person of their sister, him who was crucified for them, that he might persuade those who believe in him, that every one who suffers for the glory of Christ always has communion with the living God; and none of the beasts at that time touching her, she was taken down from the stake, thrown again into prison, and reserved for a future contest; that having overcome in various exercises, she might fully condemn the old serpent, and fire the brethren with a noble spirit of christian emulation, weak and contemptible as she might be deemed, yet clothed with Christ the mighty and invincible champion, victorious over the enemy in a variety of encounters, and crowned with immortality.

Attalus also was vehemently demanded by the multitude; for he was a person of great reputation among us; and he advanced in all the cheerfulness and serenity of a good conscience, an experienced christian, and

* The allusions to the savage shews, so frequently made in this narrative, point out their frequency in these ferocious times, and give us occasion to reflect on the mild appearances which society has assumed, since even the form of christianity has prevailed in the world

ever ready and active in bearing testimony to the truth; being led round the amphitheatre, and a tablet being carried before him, inscribed in Latin, "*This is Attalus the christian.*" The rage of the people would have had him despatched immediately; but the governor understanding that he was a Roman, ordered him back to prison, and concerning him and others, who could plead the same privilege of Roman citizenship, he wrote to the emperor, and waited for his instructions.

The interval which this circumstance occasioned was not unfruitful to the church, the unbounded compassion of Christ appeared in their patience, the dead members were restored to life by the means of the living, and the martyrs became singularly serviceable to the lapsed, and the church rejoiced to receive her sons returning to her bosom; for by their means most of those who had denied Christ were recovered, and dared to profess the Saviour; and feeling again the divine life in their souls, they approached to the tribunal; and that God who willeth not the death of a sinner being again precious to their souls, they desired a fresh opportunity of being interrogated by the governor.

Cæsar* sent orders that the confessors should be put to death, and the apostates dismissed. It was now the general assembly, held annually at Lyons, frequented from all parts, and this was the time when the christian prisoners were again exposed to the populace. The governor again interrogated; Roman citizens had the privilege of dying by decollation, the rest were exposed to wild beasts, and now it was that our Redeemer was magnified in those who had apostatized. They were interrogated separate from the rest, as persons soon to be dismissed, and made a confession to the surprise of the Gentiles, and were added to the list of martyrs.

* It must be confessed that the power of stoicism in hardening the heart was never more strongly illustrated than in the case of Marcus Antoninus, thus breaking all the rights of Roman citizenship, and all the feelings of humanity. It puts me in mind of Mr. Pope's lines,

In lazy apathy let stoics boast

Their virtue fix'd—'tis fix'd as in a frost.

A small number still remained in apostacy, but they were those who possessed not the least spark of divine faith, or had the least acquaintance with the riches of Christ in their souls, and had no fear of God before their eyes, whose life had brought reproach on christianity, and had evidenced them to be the children of perdition * ; but all the rest were added to the church.

During their examination one Alexander, a Phrygian by nation, a physician by profession, a man who had lived many years in France, and was generally known for his love of God and zealous regard for divine truth, a person of apostolical endowments, and standing near the tribunal, and by his gestures encouraging them to profess the faith, appeared to all who surrounded the tribunal as one who travailed in pain on their account. And now the multitude, incensed at the christian integrity at length exhibited by the lapsed, made a clamour against Alexander as the cause of this change. And the governor placed him before him, and asking him who he was, and he declaring that he was a christian, the former, in a passion, condemned him to the wild beasts ; and the day after he was introduced with Attalus. For the governor, willing to gratify the people, delivered him again to the wild beasts, which two having undergone all the usual methods of torture in the amphitheatre, and sustained a very grievous conflict, at length expired. Alexander neither groaned nor spake a word, but in his heart conversed with God. Attalus, sitting on the iron chair, and being scorched, when the smell issued from him, said to the multitude in Latin, "*This indeed which you do is to devour men ; but we devour not our fellow-creatures, nor practise any other wickedness.*" Being asked what is the name of God, he answered, God has not a name as men have.

On the last day of the spectacles, Blandina was again introduced with Ponticus, a youth of fifteen ; they had

* The difference between true and merely professing christians is well stated, and deserves to be noticed. A season of persecution separates real believers and real experienced christians from others, much more visibly than ministers can now do by the most judicious distinctions.

been daily brought in to see the punishment of the rest. They were ordered to swear by their idols ; and the mob perceiving them to persevere immoveably, and to treat their menaces with superior contempt, was incensed, and no pity was shewn to the sex of the one or the tender age of the other. Their tortures were now aggravated by all sorts of methods, and the whole round of barbarities was inflicted ; but menaces and punishments were equally ineffectual. Ponticus, animated by his sister, who was observed by the heathen to strengthen and confirm him, after a magnanimous exertion of patience, yielded up the ghost.

And now the blessed Blandina, last of all, as a generous mother having exhorted her children, and sent them before her victorious to the king, reviewing the whole series of their sufferings, hastened to undergo the same herself, rejoicing and triumphing in her exit, as if invited to a marriage supper, not exposed to wild beasts. After she had endured stripes, the tearing of the beasts, and the iron chair, she was inclosed in a net, and thrown to a bull ; and having been tossed some time by the animal, and being quite superior to her pains, through the influence of hope, and the realizing view of the objects of her faith and her fellowship with Christ, she at length breathed out her soul. Even her enemies confessed that no woman among them had ever suffered such and so great things. But their madness against the saints was not yet satiated. For the fierce and savage tribes of men being instigated by the ferocious enemy of mankind, were not easily softened ; and they now began another peculiar war against the bodies of the saints. That they had been conquered by their patience, gave them no stings of remorse, even the feelings of common sense and humanity being extinguished among them. Their disappointment increased their fury. The devil, the governor, and the mob equally shewed their malice, that the scripture might be fulfilled, “ He that is unjust, let him be unjust still,” as well as, “ He that is holy, let him be holy still ;” * for they

* Rev. xxii. 11. A striking proof of the sacred regard paid to that divine work in the second century.

exposed to dogs the bodies of those who had been suffocated in prison, carefully watching night and day, lest any of our people should perform funeral rites for them by stealth. And then exposing what had been left by the wild beasts, or by the fire, relics partly torn, and partly scorched, and the heads with the trunks, they preserved them unburied some days by military guards. Some gnashed on them with their teeth, desirous, if possible, to make them feel still more of their malice. Others laughed and insulted, praising their gods, and ascribing their vengeance inflicted on the martyrs to them. All were not, however, of this ferocious mould. Some of a gentler spirit, who sympathized with us in some degree, could not, however, avoid upbraiding us, often saying, Where is their God, and what profit do they derive from their religion, which they valued above life itself? So various were the agitations of mind among them.*

As for ourselves, our sorrow was great, because we were deprived of the pleasure of interring our friends. Neither the darkness of the night could befriend us, nor could we prevail by prayers or by price. They watched the bodies with unremitting vigilance, as if to deprive them of sepulchre was to them an object of great importance. The bodies of the martyrs having been contumeliously treated and exposed for six days, were burnt and reduced to ashes, and scattered by the wicked into the Rhone, that not the least particle of them might appear on the earth any more. And they did these things as if they could prevail against God, and prevent their resurrection, to deter others, as they said, from the hope of a future life, on which relying they introduce a strange and new religion, and despise the most excruciating tortures, and die with joy. "Now let us

* See here the diversity of men's conduct, flowing from the natural diversity of men's tempers or education, while all are yet equally void of the fear and love of God.

“see if they will rise again, and if their God can help them and deliver them out of our hands.”*

Eusebius observes here, that the reader may judge by analogy of the fierceness of this persecution in other parts of the empire, from this detail of the affairs at Lyons; and then adds something from the Epistle concerning the humility, meekness, and charity of the martyrs, which he contrasts with the unrelenting spirit of the Novatians, which afterwards appeared in the church. “They were such sincere followers of Christ, *who, though he was in the form of a man, thought it not robbery to be equal with God,*” that though elevated to such height of glory, and though they had borne witness for Christ not once or twice only, but often, in a variety of sufferings, yet they assumed not the venerable name of martyrs, nor permitted us to address them as such. But if any of us by letter or word gave them the title, they reproved us vehemently. For it was with much pleasure that they gave the appellation in a peculiar sense to Him who is the *faithful and true witness*, the first begotten from the dead, and the Prince of divine life. And they remembered with respect the deceased martyrs, and said, they indeed were martyrs whom Christ hath deigned to receive to himself in their confession, sealing their testimony by their exit, but we are low and mean confessors. With tears they intreated the brethren to pray fervently for them, that they might be perfected. The energy, however, of the character of martyrs they exhibited in real facts, answering with much boldness to the Gentiles; and their magnanimity, undaunted, calm, and intrepid, was visible to all the world, though the fear of God induced them to refuse the title of martyrs. They humbled themselves under the mighty hand by which they are now exalted.† They were ready to give a modest reason of the hope

* The natural enmity of the human mind against the things of God was never more strongly exemplified than in this persecution. The folly of thinking to defeat the counsels of God appears most conspicuous; and so does the faith and hope of a blessed resurrection, the peculiarly animating theme of true christians.

† 1 Pet. v.

that was in them before all, they accused none ; they took pleasure in commending, none in censuring, and they prayed for their murderers, as Stephen the accomplished martyr did, " Lord lay not this sin to their charge." And if he prayed thus for those who stoned him, how much more for the brethren ? This was indeed their ambition, that, by the genuine solidity of their charity, the malignant dragon being suffocated, might be obliged to disgorge himself of those alive and unhurt, whom he thought he had devoured. Nor did they glory over the lapsed ; they supplied their weaknesses with maternal tenderness, and shed many tears over them to the Father ; they asked life for them, and he gave them it, which they were glad to communicate to their neighbours, in all things coming off victorious before God, ever cultivating peace, ever commending peace, in peace they went to God, not leaving trouble to their mother, the church, nor faction and sedition to the brethren, but joy, peace, unanimity, and charity."

Eusebius has given us another passage also which deserves attention. Alcibiades, one of the martyrs, had led the life of an ascetic before the persecution, and used to subsist only on bread and water ; as he continued the same regimen while in confinement, it was revealed in a vision to Attalus, after his first contest in the amphitheatre, that Alcibiades did ill not to use the creatures of God, and gave an occasion of scandal to others. Alcibiades was hence induced to change his diet, and partake of the bounty of God with thanksgiving. In truth, these martyrs appear to have been not left destitute of the grace of God, but to have indeed been favoured with the influences of the Holy Ghost. Eusebius tells us also of an Epistle directed by these martyrs to Eleutherus the bishop of Rome, in which they give a very honourable encomium of Irenæus the presbyter. Of him we shall have occasion to speak more hereafter. He was appointed successor to Pothinus, outlived the storm, and governed the church afterwards with much ability and success. The letter to the churches of

Asia and Phrygia, of which Eusebius has given us such large and valuable extracts, seems to give a strong idea of his piety and judgment.

The superstitions which afterwards broke out with so much strength, and like a strong mist so long obscured the light of the church, appear not to have tarnished the glory of those Gallic martyrs. The case of Alcibiades, and the wholesome check which the divine goodness put to his well-meant austerities, demonstrate that excesses of this nature had not yet gained any remarkable ascendancy in the church. And the description of the humility and charity of the martyrs shews a spirit much superior to that which we shall have occasion, with regret, to notice in some succeeding annals of martyrdom. In a word, the power of divine grace appears little less than apostolical in the church at Lyons. The only disagreeable circumstance in the whole narrative is the too florid and tumid style, peculiar to the Asiatic Greeks, and which Cicero, in his rhetorical works, so finely contrasts to the Attic neatness and purity. In a translation it seems scarce possible to do justice to thoughts extremely evangelical and spiritual, clothed originally in so tawdry a garb. Yet under this great disadvantage a discerning eye will see much of the unction of real godliness. At first sight we are struck with the difference between primitive scriptural christianity, and that affectation of rational divinity, which has so remarkably gained the ascendant in christendom in our times. In the account we have read, the good influence of the Holy Spirit on the one hand, and the evil influence of Satan on the other, are brought forward every where to our view. In our times both are concealed, or almost annihilated, and nothing appears but what is merely human. Whether of the two methods is most agreeable to the scripture, must be obvious to every serious and honest inquirer. Christ's kingdom, in the narrative before us, appears indeed spiritual and divine ; christian faith, hope, and charity, do their work under the direction of his Spirit ; christians are humble, meek, heavenly-minded, patient, sus-

tained continually with aid invisible, and you see Satan actively, but unsuccessfully, engaged against them. In modern christian religion, what a different taste and spirit ! every thing is of this world ! policy, ambition, the display and parade of learning and argument, the belief of satanic influence ridiculed always as weak superstition, and natural reason and self-sufficiency triumphing without measure, leave no room for the exhibition of the work of God and the power of the Holy Ghost !



CHAPTER VII.

The State of Christians under the Reigns of Commodus, Pertinax, and Julian, and the Story of Peregrinus.

THE reigns of the two last-mentioned emperors which close the century are short, and contain no christian memoirs. That of Commodus is remarkable for the peace granted to the church of Christ through the world.* The means which Divine Providence used for this purpose is still more so. Marcia, a woman of low rank, was the favourite concubine of this emperor. She had on some account, not now understood, a predilection for the christians, and employed her interest with Commodus in their favour.† He was himself the most vicious and profligate of all mortals, though the son of the grave Marcus Antoninus. Those who looked at secular objects and moral decorum alone, might regret the change of emperors. In one particular point only Commodus was more just and equitable than his father. The church of Christ is as abhorrent in its plan and spirit from moral philosophers as from debauchees, and though friendly to every thing virtuous and laudable in society, has a taste peculiarly its own. And the pow-

* Euseb. b. 5. ch. 19.

† Dion Cassius.

er and goodness of God in making even such wretched characters as Commodus and Marcia to stem the torrent of persecution, and to afford a breathing time of twelve years under the son, after eighteen years of the most cruel sufferings under the father, deserve to be remarked. The gospel now flourished abundantly, and many of the nobility of Rome, with their whole families, embraced it. Such a circumstance would naturally excite the envy of the great. The Roman Senate felt its dignity defiled by innovations, which to them appeared to the last degree contemptible, and to this malignant source, I think, is to be ascribed the only instance of persecution in this reign.

Apollonius, a person renowned for learning and philosophy at that time in Rome, was a sincere christian, and as a christian was accused by an informer before Perennis the judge, a person of considerable influence in the reign of Commodus. The law of Antoninus Pius had enacted grievous punishments against the accusers of christians. One cannot suppose his edict had any force during the reign of his successor, but under Commodus it was revived, or rather a new one still more severe was enacted, that the accusers should be put to death.* Perennis sentenced the accuser accordingly, and his legs were broken. Thus far he seems to have obeyed the dictates of the law ; in what follows he obeyed the dictates of his own malice, or rather that of the Senate. He begged of the prisoner with much earnestness, that he would give an account of his faith before the Senate and the Court. Apollonius complied, and delivered an apology for christianity ; in consequence of which by a decree of the Senate he was beheaded. It is not quite easy to account for this procedure. It is perhaps the only trial we read of in which both accuser and accused suffered judicially. Eusebius observes, that the laws were still in force, commanding christians to be put to death who had been presented before the tribunal. But Adrian, or certainly Antoni-

* Euseb. *ibid.*

nus Pius, had abrogated this iniquitous edict of Trajan. Under Marcus it might be revived, as what cruelty against christians might not be expected under him ? Now Commodus, by menacing persecutors with death, might suppose he had sufficiently secured the christians. Yet, if a formal abrogation of the law against christians had been neglected, one may see how Apollonius came to suffer as well as his adversary. In truth, had he been silent, he probably had saved his life. Insidious artifices, under the pretence of much respect and desire of information, seem to have drawn him into a measure which cost him his life. However he died in a cause able to bear him out even beyond the limits of time !

There is a remarkable story of one Peregrinus, which we meet with in the works of Lucian, which as it falls in with this century, and throws light on the character of christians who then lived, deserves to be here introduced. “In his youth he fell into shameful crimes, for which he was near losing his life in Armenia and Asia. I will not dwell on those crimes ; but I am persuaded that what I am about to say is worthy of attention. There is none of you but know that being chagrined that his father was still alive after being turned of sixty years of age, he strangled him. The rumour of so black a crime being spread abroad, he betrayed his guilt by his flight. He wandered about in divers countries to conceal the place of his retreat, till, upon coming into Judea, he learnt the admirable doctrine of the christians, by conversing with their priests and teachers. In a little time he shewed them that they were but children compared to him ; for he became not only a prophet, but the head of their congregation ; in a word, he was every thing to them ; he explained their books and composed some himself ; insomuch that they spoke of him as a god, and considered him as their lawgiver and ruler. However these people adore that great Person who had been crucified in Palestine, as being the first who taught men that religion. While these things were going on, Peregri-

nus was apprehended and put in prison on account of his being a christian. This disgrace loaded him with honour, the very thing he ardently desired, made him more reputable among those of that persuasion, and furnished him with a power of performing wonders. The christians, grievously afflicted at his confinement, used their utmost endeavours to procure him his liberty; and as they saw they could not compass it, they provided abundantly for all his wants, and rendered him all imaginable services. There was seen, by break of day, at the prison-gate, a company of old women, widows, and orphans, some of whom after having corrupted the guard with money, passed the night with him; there they partook together of elegant repasts, and entertained one another with religious discourses. They called that excellent man the new Socrates. There came even christians, deputed from many cities of Asia, to converse with him, to comfort him, and to bring him supplies of money; for the care and diligence which the christians exert in these junctures is incredible; they spare nothing in these cases; they sent, therefore, large sums to Peregrinus, and his confinement was to him an occasion of amassing great riches; for these poor creatures are firmly persuaded they shall one day enjoy immortal life; therefore they despise death with wonderful courage, and offer themselves voluntarily to punishment. Their first law-giver has put into their heads that they are all brethren. Since they separated from us, they persevere in rejecting the gods of the Grecians, and worshipping that deceiver who was crucified; they regulate their manners and conduct by his laws; they despise, therefore, all earthly possessions, and enjoy them in common. Therefore if any magician or juggler, any cunning fellow who knows how to make his advantage of opportunity, happens to get into their society, he immediately grows rich; because it is easy for a man of this sort to abuse the simplicity of these silly people. However Peregrinus was set at liberty by the president of Syria, who was a lover of philosophy and its professors, and who, having perceived that this man

courted death out of vanity and a fondness for renown, released him, despising him too much to have a desire of inflicting capital punishment on him. Peregrinus returned into his own country, and as some were inclined to prosecute him on account of his paracide, he gave all his wealth to his fellow citizens, who, being gained by this liberality, imposed silence on his accusers. He left his country a second time in order to travel, reckoning he should find every thing he wanted in the purses of the christians, who were punctual in accompanying him wherever he went, and supplied him with all things in abundance. He subsisted in this manner for some time ; but having done something which the christians abhor, (they saw him, I think, make use of some meats forbidden amongst them) he was abandoned by them ; insomuch that having not any longer the means of support, he would fain have revoked the donation he had made to his country.”

The native place of this extraordinary man was Parium in Mysia. After his renunciation of christianity he assumed the character of a philosopher. In that light he is mentioned by several heathen authors ; and this part he acted till the time of his death, when in his old age he threw himself into the flames, probably because suicide was honourable in the eyes of the Gentiles, and because Empedocles, a brother philosopher, had thrown himself into the volcano at mount *Ætna*.* A remark or two must be made on the writer, the hero, and the christians of those times.

It will not be necessary to give an anxious answer to the railleries, cavils, and insinuations of Lucian in this narrative. Whoever knows any thing of real christianity, and the usual obloquy thrown upon it, will easily make just deductions, and separate what is true from what is false. Lucian was one of the most facetious authors of antiquity. He doubtless possessed the talents of wit and satire in a supreme degree. But truth and candour are not usually to be expected from writers

* Lardner's Collect. vol. 11. c. xix.—Bullet's Establishment of Christianity.

of this sort, and like all men of his vein, whose eyes are turned malignantly towards all objects but themselves, he was intolerably self-conceited. He may be ranked with Voltaire, Hume, Rousseau, and other modern writers of this stamp. Even Pope and Swift, though without their open and avowed infidelity, have much of the same turn of mind, sarcastic, unfeeling, and suspecting evil every where, except in themselves. The common consequence of such a temper, indulged without restraint, is a skeptical indifference to all sorts of religion, a contempt of every mode of it without distinction, and a supercilious self-applause on account of their own superior discernment. Such men, of all others, seem most to fall under the censure of the wise man, "*He that trusteth his own heart is a fool.*" They take for granted the sincerity, humanity, and benevolence of their own hearts, with as much positiveness as they do the obliquity and hypocrisy of other men's. Antiquity had one Lucian; and it must be confessed the absurdities of paganism afforded him a large field of satire, which eventually was not unserviceable to the progress of christianity. Our times have had many of this stamp; and it is one of the most striking characteristics of the depravity of modern taste, that they are so much read and esteemed.

Peregrinus is no uncommon character. In a lower scene I have seen such men of extreme wickedness, whose early life seems to have been devoted to nothing but evil, then something of the garb and mode of real christians was assumed. It is not every one who has the abilities of Peregrinus to wear it with consummate address, and to impose on genuine christians of undoubted discernment. The savage heart of Lucian seems to rejoice in the impositions of Peregrinus, and particularly that he was able to impose on christians so long and so completely. A philanthropic mind would rather have been tempted to mourn over the depravity of human nature, that it should be capable of such wickedness. Providence often sets a dismal mark upon such men in this life. He lived long enough to appear a complete impostor, and be rendered intolerable

to christians ; he acted the philosopher afterwards, it seems, a long time ; for what is called philosophy is consistent enough with hypocrisy, and his dreadful end should be awfully instructive to mankind.

Yet what is there in all this account of the christians, discoloured as it is by the malignant author, which does not tell to their honour ? While Peregrinus made a creditable profession, they received and rejoiced in him ; they did not pretend to infallibility. His superior parts and artifice enabled him a long time to deceive. It is probable that he avoided as much as possible the society of the most sagacious and penetrating among christians. The followers of Jesus had learnt to spare their neighbours' motes and to feel their own beams. They were most solicitously guarded against that species of deception which is the most fatal, the delusion of a man's own heart. If many of them were hence too much exposed to the snares of designing men, the thing tells surely to their honour, rather than to their disgrace. As for the rest, their liberality, their zeal, their compassion, their brotherly love, their fortitude, their heavenly-mindedness, are confessed in all this narrative to have been exceeding great. I rejoice to hear from the mouth of an enemy such a testimony to the character of christians ; it is one of the best which I can meet with in the second century. Amidst such a dearth of materials it was not to be omitted. Christians must then, at least, have been in morals much superior to the rest of mankind, and it is only to be lamented, that he who could relate this, had not the wisdom to make a profitable use of it for himself.

CHAPTER VIII.

Some Account of Christian Authors who flourished in this Century.

IT may throw some additional light on the history of christian doctrine and manners in this century, to give a brief view of these. Yet some of the most renowned have been already spoken to, and a few more of great respectability shall be deferred to the next century, because they out-lived this.

Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, lived under the reign of Marcus Antoninus and his son Commodus. He wrote many Epistles to various churches, which demonstrate his care and vigilance in support of christianity; a pleasing proof that Corinth was singularly favoured by being possessed of a zealous and charitable pastor, though of his labours there, and of the state of the numerous society of christians under his ministry, we have no account. He wrote to the Lacedæmonians an instruction concerning the doctrine of the gospel and an exhortation to peace and unity. He wrote to the Athenians also, and by his testimony he confirms the account before given of their declension after the martyrdom of Publius, and their revival under the care of Quadratus, and here he informs us that Dionysius the areopagite was the first bishop of Athens. In his letter to the christians in Crete he highly commends Philip the bishop, and guards them against heresies. In his Epistle to the churches of Pontus, he directs that all penitents should be received who return to the church, whatever their past crimes have been, even heresy itself. One may infer from hence, that discipline was as yet administered with much strictness in the churches, and that purity of doctrine, as well as of life and manners, were looked on as of high importance, insomuch that some were inclined to a degree of rigour incompatible

with the gospel, which promises full and free forgiveness through Christ to every returning sinner, without limitations or exceptions. Such inferences concerning the manners and spirit of the christians at that time seem obvious and natural; the present state of church discipline among all denominations of christians in England would undoubtedly require very different sorts of directions. He writes also to Pinytus, bishop of the Gnossians in Crete, advising him not to impose on the christians the heavy burden of the obligation to preserve their virginity, but to have respect to the weakness incident to most of them. It seemed worth while to mention this also as a proof that monastic austerities were beginning to appear in the church, and that the best men, after the example of the apostles, laboured to control them. Pinytus in his reply extols Dionysius, and exhorts him to afford his people more solid nourishment, and send frequent letters to him which might fill his congregation, lest, being always fed with milk, they should remain in a state of infancy. This answer speaks something of the depth of thought and knowledge in godliness, with which Pinytus was endowed.

In his letter to the Romans, directed to Soter their bishop, he recommends to them to continue a charitable custom, which, from their first plantation, they had always practised, which was to send relief to divers churches throughout the world, and to assist particularly those who were condemned to the mines; a strong proof both that the Roman church continued opulent and numerous, and also that they still partook much of the spirit of Christ.*

Theophilus of Antioch is a person of whom it were to be wished that we had a larger account. He was brought up a Gentile, educated in all the knowledge which was then reputable in the world, and was doubtless a man of considerable parts and learning. His conversion to christianity seems to have been the most reasonable in the world. The Holy Spirit in his

* Euseb. b. 4. ch. 23.

operations ever appears to adapt himself much to the different tempers of the subjects of them. Theophilus was a reasoner, and the grace of God, while it convinced him of his inability to work himself out of his doubts, effectually instructed his understanding. The belief of a resurrection seems to have been a mighty impediment to his reception of the gospel. What is called philosophy varies in different ages. Such an objection to christianity would scarce now be made; but philosophy ever fails not, in some form or other, to withstand the religion of Jesus.

Of his labours in his bishopric of Antioch we have no account. He carried on a correspondence with a learned man Autolycus, with what success in the end we are not told. He appears also to have been very vigilant against fashionable heresies. He sat thirteen years in his bishopric, and died in peace about the second or third year of Commodus.*

Melito, bishop of Sardis, from the very little of his remains that are extant, may be conceived to be one whom God might make use of for the revival of godliness in that drooping church. The very titles of some of his works excite our regret for the loss of them. One of them is on the submission of the senses to faith; another on the soul, the body, and the spirit; another on God incarnate. A fragment of his, preserved by the author of the Chronicle, called the Alexandrian, says, that the christians do not adore insensible stones, but that they worship one God alone, who is before all things and in all things, and Jesus Christ who is God before all ages. He lived under the reign of Marcus Antoninus. His unsuccessful but masterly Apology presented to that emperor, was before taken notice of. He travelled into the east on purpose to collect authentic ecclesiastical information, and gives us a catalogue of the sacred books of the Old Testament. He died and was buried at Sardis; a man whom Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, his contemporary, calls an eunuch, that is,

* Euseb. b. 4. ch. 23. and Cave's Life of Theophilus.

one who made himself an eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake.* Several such, I apprehend, were in the primitive times. But the depravity of human nature is ever pushing men into extremes on the right hand and on the left. There soon arose some who made a self-righteous use of these instances of self-denial, and clogged them with unwarrantable excesses. The contrary extreme is now so prevalent, that for a man to follow the example of Melito on the same generous principles which our Saviour expresses, would be thought very extraordinary, and even ridiculous. But whatever has the sanction of Holy Writ should be observed to the honour of those who practise it, whether agreeable to the taste of the age we live in or not, unless we mean to set up the eighteenth century as a pope to judge the foregoing seventeen. The same Polycrates observes of him, that his actions were regulated by the motions of the Holy Ghost, and that he lies interred at Sardis, where he expects the judgment and resurrection.

Bardasanes of Mesopotamia, a man renowned for learning and eloquence, escaped not the pollution of the fantastic heresy of Valentinian. His talents and his love of refinement were probably his snare; but, as he afterwards condemned the fabulous dreams by which he had been infatuated, and is allowed to be sound in the main, some relics of his former heresy might remain without materially injuring either his faith or his practice. I know no particular reason for mentioning him at all, but for the sake of introducing a remarkable passage from him, preserved by Eusebius, † which shews at once the great progress and deep energy of christianity.

“In Parthia,” says he, “polygamy is allowed and practised, but the christians of Parthia practise it not. In Persia the same may be said with respect to incest. In Bactria and in Gaul the rights of matrimony are

* Matthew xix. Euseb. b. 4. ch. 22. Dupin and Cave.

† Euseb. Precep. Evang. Jortin's Remarks IV.

defiled with impunity. The christians there act not thus. In truth, wherever they reside, they triumph in their practice over the worst of laws and the worst of customs." This eulogium is not more strong than just; and the influence of God, in supporting his own truth and his own religion, appeared by such fruits as no other religion or philosophy could ever shew.

Miltiades was usefully engaged in discriminating the genuine influences of the Holy Spirit from the fictitious, of which unhappy instances had then appeared. False prophets evinced the most stupid ignorance in the beginning, in the end a distempered imagination and furious frenzy. Miltiades shewed that the influence of the Holy Spirit, described in scripture, was sober, consistent, reasonable, of a quite different cast and genius. There is no new thing under the sun; impostures and delusions exist at this day, and why should it not be thought as reasonable now to discriminate genuine from fictitious or diabolical influences, by laying down the true marks and evidences of each, instead of scornfully treating all alike as enthusiastic? The extraordinary and miraculous influences come chiefly under Miltiades' inspection; they were at that time very common in the christian church; and delusive pretences, particularly those of Montanus and his followers, were common also. The discerning reader will know how to apply these things to our own times.

Apollinarius of Hierapolis wrote several books under the reign of Marcus Antoninus. We have at present only their titles. One of them was a Defence of Christianity, dedicated to the emperor. The work of which we know the most, from a fragment preserved in Eusebius, is that against the montanists, which will fall under our observation in the next chapter.

Athenagoras, towards the latter end of this century, wrote an Apology for the Christian Religion. His testimony to the doctrine of the trinity, contained in it, expresses something besides a speculative belief of it. It seems to have appeared to him of essential consequence in practical godliness. He is a writer not

mentioned by Eusebius. Du Pin does him injustice by observing that he recommends the worship of angels. I have not access to his Apology, but shall give a remarkable quotation from Dr. Waterland, to whom I am obliged for the only valuable information I have of this author.* Speaking of christians, he describes them as men that made small account of the present life, but were intent only upon contemplating God, and knowing his word, who is from him, what union the Son has with the Father, what communion the Father has with the Son, what the Spirit is, and what the union and distinction are of such so united, the Spirit, the Son and the Father.

If this is true (and Athenagoras may well be credited for the fact) it is not to be wondered at, that the primitive christians were so anxiously tenacious of the doctrine. It was the climate in which alone christian fruit could grow. Their speculations were not merely abstracted. They found in the view of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, something of energy to raise them from earth to heaven. This could be nothing else than the peculiar truths of the gospel, which are so closely interwoven with the doctrine of the trinity. The right use of the doctrine is briefly, but strongly intimated in the passage, and the connexion between christian principles and practice appears. In truth, a Trinitarian speculatist may be as worldly-minded as any other. His doctrine, however, contains that which alone can make a man otherwise.

* Epiphanius Heres. 54. 1. See Dr. Waterland's Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity.

CHAPTER IX.

The Heresies and Controversies of this Century reviewed, and an Idea of the State and Progress of Christianity during the Course of it.

IT is surely not worth while to enter minutely into the heresies which appeared in this century. Besides that my plan calls me not to notice them at all, any further than they may throw some light on the work of God's Holy Spirit and the progress of godliness, in the times in which they appeared. For they could never deserve to be made objects of capital attention on their own account. Yet it was necessary to examine and confute them. Irenæus did charitably in so doing. It is, however, to be regretted, that in his celebrated work against heresies, he should be obliged to employ so much time on scenes of so much nonsense. Let it be remarked in general, that the same opposition to the deity of Christ, or his manhood, and the same insidious methods of depreciating or abusing the doctrines of grace, continued in the second century, which had begun in the first, with this difference, that they were now multiplied, varied, complicated, and refined by endless subtilties and fancies, in which the poverty of taste and genius, so common in a period when letters are declining, appears no less than the corruption of christian doctrine. Like spots in the sun, however, they vanished and disappeared from time to time, though revived again in different forms and circumstances. Not one of the heresiarchs of this century was able to create a strong and permanent interest, and it is no little proof of the continued goodness and grace of God to his church, that they still kept themselves separate and distinct, and preserved the purity of discipline.

It has often been said, that many have been enlisted among heretics, who were real christians. When I see

a proof of this, I shall take notice of it. But of the heretics in the second century, I fear, in general, no such favourable judgment ought to be passed. The state of christian affairs in truth, was such as to afford no probable reason for any real good man to dissent. Where was there more of piety and virtue to be found than among the general society of christians? And how could any be more exposed to the cross of Christ than they?

The first set of heretics of this century, were those who opposed or corrupted the doctrines of the person of Christ. A single quotation from Eusebius may be sufficient as a specimen.

Speaking of the books which were published in these times, he observes,* “among them there is found a volume written against the heresy of Artemon, which Paulus of Samosata in our days endeavoured to revive.” When this book had confuted the said presumptuous heresy, which affirmed Christ to be a mere man, and that this was an ancient opinion, after many leaves tending to the confutation of this blasphemous falsehood, he writes thus: “They affirm that all our ancestors, even the apostles themselves, were of that opinion, and taught the same with them, and that this their true doctrine was preached and embraced to the time of Victor, the 13th bishop of Rome after Peter, and was corrupted by his successor Zephyrinus. This might carry a plausible appearance of truth, were it not first contradicted by the Holy Scriptures, next by the books of several persons long before the time of Victor, which they published against the Gentiles in the defence of the truth, and in confutation of the heresies of their time. I mean Justin, Miltiades, Tatian, and Clement, with many others, in all which works Christ is preached and published to be God. Who knoweth not that the works of Irenæus, Melito, and all other christians do confess Christ to be both God and Man? In fine, how many psalms, and hymns, and canticles were

* B. 5. 25.

written from the beginning by faithful christians, which celebrate Christ, the Word of God, as no other than God indeed? How then is it possible, according to their report, that our ancestors, to the time of Victor, should have preached so, when the creed of the church for so many years is pronounced as certain, and known to all the world? And ought they not to be ashamed to report such falsehoods of Victor, when they know it to be a fact, that this very Victor excommunicated Theodotus, a tanner, the father of this apostacy, who denied the divinity of Christ, because he first affirmed Christ to be only man. If Victor, as they report, had been of their blasphemous sentiments, how could he have excommunicated Theodotus the author of the heresy?"

Victor's government was about the close of the second century. The anonymous author before us writes most probably in the former part of the third. Nor is his testimony much invalidated by his being anonymous. The facts to which he speaks were notorious and undeniable. We see hence that all parties, notwithstanding the contempt, which some affect, of the testimony of antiquity and tradition, are glad to avail themselves of it where they can; which is itself a proof of the tacit consent of all mankind, that this testimony, though by no means decisive, nor such as ought ever to be put in competition with scripture, yet weighs something, and ought not to be treated with unreserved disdain. In our own days the same attempt has been made in the same cause, with what probability of success, in the way of sound argument, let the reader, who has considered the passage I have quoted from Eusebius, judge for himself. In fact, it appears that a denial of the deity of Christ could not find any patron within the pale of the church for the first two hundred years. The prevalency of sentiments derogatory to the person and offices of Christ was reserved for a later period. Every person of any eminence in the church for judgment and piety holds unequivocally an opposite language. In some of the most renowned we have seen it all along in the course of this century.

This Theodotus was a citizen of Byzantium, a tanner, but a man of parts and learning. Heretical per-versions of scripture have often been invented by such persons, and pride and self-conceit seem to have a peculiar ascendancy over men who have acquired their knowledge in private by their own industry: one of the best advantages of public seminaries being undoubtedly this, that modesty and reasonable submission are learnt in them, and men, by seeing and feeling their own inferiority, are taught to think more lowly of their own attainments. This self-taught currier speculated, felt himself important enough to dare to be singular, and revived the heresy of Ebion. He was brought with some other christians before persecuting magistrates. His companions honestly confessed Christ and suffered. He was the only man of the company who denied him. In truth, he had no principles strong enough to induce him to bear the cross of Christ. Theodotus lived still a denier of Christ, and being afterwards upbraided for denying his God, No, says he, I have not denied God, but man, for Christ is no more.* His heresy hence obtained a new name, that of the God-denying apostacy.† Persecution often does in this life, in part, what the last day will do completely, separate wheat from tares!

2. The controversy concerning the proper time of the observation of Easter, which had been amicably adjusted between Polycarp of Smyrna and Anicetus of Rome, who had agreed to differ, was unhappily revived towards the close of this century. Synods were held concerning it, and an uniformity was attempted in vain throughout the church. Victor of Rome, with much arrogance and temerity, as if he had felt the very soul of the future papacy formed in himself, inveighed against the Asiatic churches, and pronounced them excommunicated persons. The firmness, moderation, and charity of one man was of great service in quashing the dangerous contention. Iren-

* Damascen Heres. 54.

† ἀρρησιθεος ἀποστασία.

æus, bishop of Lyons, rebuked the uncharitable spirit of Victor, reminded him of the union between Polycarp and his predecessor Anicetus, notwithstanding their difference of sentiment and practice in this point, and pressed the strong obligation of christians to love and unity, though they might differ in smaller matters; and surely a smaller matter of diversity was scarce ever known to occasion a contention.

The particulars of the debate are not worth reciting. Certain fundamentals being stated in the first place, in which all real christians are united, they may safely be left each to follow their private judgment in other things, and yet hold the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. But that this was effected with so much difficulty, and that so slight a subject should appear of so great a moment at this time, seems no small proof that the power of true godliness had suffered some declension, and was an omen of the decay of the happy effects of the first great out-pouring of the Spirit, toward the close of this century. When faith and love are simple, strong, and active in an eminent degree, such subjects of debate are ever known to vanish as mists before the sun.

3. The church was internally shaken and much disfigured by the heresy of Montanus. This is the account of it given by Apollinaris of Hierapolis, who took pains to confute it.* “Being lately at Ancyra in Galatia, I found the church throughout filled, not with prophets, as they call them, but with false prophets, where, with the help of the Lord, I disputed in the church for many days against them, so that the church rejoiced and was confirmed in the truth; the adversaries were vexed and murmured. The original of them was this: There is a village in Mysia, a region of Phrygia, called Ardaba, where we are told that Montanus, a late convert in the time of Gratus, proconsul of Asia, elated with ambition, gave advantage to Satan against him. The man behaved in a frantic manner.

* Euseb. b. 5. ch. 14.

and pretended to prophecy. Some who heard him, checked him as a lunatic, and forbad his public exhibitions, mindful of our Saviour's predictions and warnings against false prophets; others boasted of him as endued with the Holy Ghost, and forgetting the divine admonitions were ensnared by his arts and encouraged his imposture. Two women were by Satan possessed of the same spirit, and spake foolish and fanatical things. They gloried in their own supposed superior sanctity and happiness, and were deluded with the most flattering expectations. Few of the Phrygians were seduced, though they took upon them to revile every church under heaven which did not pay homage to their pretended inspirations. The faithful throughout Asia in frequent synods examined and condemned the heresy."

It has ever been one of the greatest trials to men really led by the Spirit of God, besides the open opposition of the profane, to be obliged to encounter the subtile devices of Satan in raising up pretended illuminations, which, by their folly, and wickedness, and self-conceit, expose godliness to contempt. The marks of distinction are plain to serious minds and those of tolerable judgment and discretion, but men void of the fear of God will not distinguish. We see here an instance of what has often been repeated from that day to the present in the church of Christ, and real christians did then, what ought always to be done now, examine, expose, condemn, and separate themselves from such delusions, while enthusiasts, of every age, in folly, pride, and uncharitableness, have followed the pattern of Montanus. Nothing happened here but what is foretold in scripture, and is in truth so common a concomitant of the real work of God, that wherever it appears, there this appears also.

4. But the irruptions of fanaticism are too unnatural to remain long in any degree of strength. Whatever high pretensions they make to the influences of the Divine Spirit, they are ever unfavourable to them in reality, not only by their unholy tendency during the paroxysm of zeal, but much more so by the effects of

contemptuous profaneness and incredulous skepticism which they leave behind them. It is for the sake of these chiefly that Satan seems to invent and support such delusions. But his grand resource against the gospel is drawn from contrivances more congenial with the nature of man. The deceit of philosophy formed the last corruption of this century, which I shall lay open to the best of my judgment from the lights of history. It was toward the close of the century that it made its appearance, nor were the effects of it very great at present ; in the next century they appeared very distinctly.

Alexandria was at this time the most renowned seminary of learning. A sort of philosophers there appeared who called themselves Eclectics, because, without tying themselves down to any one set of rules, they chose what they thought most agreeable to truth from different masters and sects. Their pretensions were specious, and while they carried the appearance of candour, moderation, and dispassionate inquiry, administered much fuel to the pride of men, leaning to their own understandings. Ammonius Saccas, a famous Alexandrian teacher, seems to have reduced the opinions of this sect to a system. Plato was his principal guide ; but he invented many things of which Plato never dreamed. What his religious profession was is disputed among the learned. Undoubtedly he was bred a christian, and though Porphyry, in his enmity against christianity, observes that he forsook the gospel and returned to gentilism, yet the testimony of Eusebius,* who must have known, seems decisive to the contrary, that he continued a christian all his days. And his tracts of the agreement of Moses and Jesus, and his harmony of the four gospels demonstrate that he desired to be considered as a christian. This man fancied that all religions, vulgar and philosophical, Grecian and barbarous, Jewish and Gentile, meant the same thing at bottom. He undertook by allegorizing and subtilizing

* B. G. ch. 18. Ec. Hist.

various fables and systems, to make up a coalition of all sects and religions, and from his labours continued by his disciples, some of whose works still remain, men learnt to look on Jew, Philosopher, vulgar Pagan, and Christian, as all of the same creed.

Dr. Lardner, in opposition to Mosheim, who seems to have very successfully illustrated this matter, contends that there were no such motley-mixed characters, and that the scheme is chimerical. I have attended as well as I can to his own account of the man in his Collection, and to his review of philosophers in the third and following centuries, and it appears to me that there were such persons. Ammonius himself seems to have been, if I may be allowed the expression, a Pagano-christian. That Eusebius and Porphyry should each claim him for their own, is no little proof of his ambiguous character, and I wish we may not have too melancholy proofs of the same thing, when we come to consider the characters of many of the fathers who followed. Longinus, who was of the same school, though more a philologist than a philosopher, in his well-known respectful quotation from Moses, evinces that he was tinctured with the same spirit. Plotinus is largely and fully in the same scheme. Who knows whether to call Ammianus the historian, and Chalcidius, Christian or Pagan? They affected to be both, or rather pretended that both meant the same thing; and in the fourth and fifth century, though some, with Porphyry, through the virulence of their opposition, were decided enemies of Christ, it is certain that such ambiguous characters abounded among the christians.

In truth, we see in every age similar scenes. The gospel in its infancy has to struggle with the open and avowed enmity of all mankind. He whose decisive power alone can do it, after floods of persecution and a thousand discouragements, gives his religion a settlement in the world too strong to be overturned, as its enemies hoped at first would be the case. The light of divine truth fails not to make some impression on minds by no means converted by it to God. There are many

truths which christianity has in common with natural religion, though it enforces them with much greater clearness, and, above all, exhibits men who practise accordingly. Thence ingenious persons are ready to persuade themselves, that their philosophy and the gospel mean the same in substance. They compliment christianity with some respectful attention, and yet studiously avoid the cross of Christ, and the precise peculiarities of the gospel, in order to preserve their credit in the world. We have seen so much of this, and the number of doubtful characters which is the result of it, that I can more easily believe the truth of Mosheim's account.

Undoubtedly the appearance of persons of this sort is a sure symptom that the gospel is raised to some degree of eminence and stability in the world. In the first century such a doubtful character would have been a rare phenomenon. Philosophers found no desire to coalesce with a religion contemptible in their eyes in all respects. It was not till numbers gave it some respectability, that such a coalition took place. Seneca would have thought himself sufficiently liberal in being content with scorning a religion, which Ammonius a century afterwards deigned to incorporate, in pretence at least, with his philosophy. It has been observed, that the attempt of the court of Charles the first to draw over some of the parliamentary leaders to their interest, was a sure sign of the diminution of regal despotism. Satan beheld the decay of his empire of idolatry and philosophy in the same light, and it behoved him to try the same arts to preserve, if he could, what remained. Melancholy and disastrous as was the evil we are contemplating, and even more decisively destructive to the progress of vital godliness than any other which had yet appeared, it was however an evidence of the victorious strength of the gospel, and a confession of weakness on the part of Paganism.

In carrying on these acts of seduction, the insidiousness of such middle characters consisted much in expatiating on the truths which lie in common, as of the great-

est importance, and in reducing, as far as in them lay, the peculiar truths of the gospel into oblivion. It was just in this manner, I remember, that a clergyman speaks (I think a vicar of Newcastle) in a sermon preached on the accession of James the second. While he deals out strains of fulsome adulation on the sovereign, he answers the objection against him drawn from his religion, by observing of what little importance opinions were, and that moral and practical matters were alone worthy of consideration. The conduct of James, in a little time after, shewed the weakness of this reasoning; and the effects of this philosophical evil, which like leaven soon spread in some faint degree over the whole church, shewed too plainly that pure and undefiled sentiments of religion are of high importance.

We have hitherto found it no hard matter to discover, in the teachers and writers of christianity, the vital doctrines of Christ. We shall now find that the most precious truths of the gospel begin to be less attended to, and less brought into view. Even Justin Martyr, before the period of eclectic corruption, by his fondness for Plato, adulterated the gospel in some degree, as we have observed, particularly in the article of free will. Tatian, a scholar of his, after his master's death, went bolder lengths, and deserved the name of heretic. He dealt largely in the merits of continence and chastity, and these virtues, pushed into extravagant excesses under the notion of superior purity, became great engines of self-righteousness and superstition, and obscured men's views of the faith of Christ, and darkened the whole face of christianity. Under the fostering hand of Ammonius and his followers, this fictitious holiness was formed into a system, and generated the worst of evils under the form of eminent sanctity. That man is altogether fallen, that he is to be justified wholly by the faith of Christ, that his atonement and mediation alone procures us access to God and eternal life, that holiness is the effect of divine grace, and is the proper work of the Holy Spirit on the heart of man; these, and if there be any other similar evangelical truths, as it was not possible to

mix them with platonism, faded gradually of themselves in the church, and were at length partly denied and partly forgotten.

St. Paul's caution against philosophy and vain deceit, it appears, was now fatally neglected by the christians. False humility, will-worship, curious and proud refinements, bodily austerities mixed with high self-righteous pretensions, ignorance of Christ and of the true life of faith in him, miserably superseded by ceremonies and superstitions :—All these things are divinely delineated in the second chapter to the Colossians, and, so far as words can do it, the true defence against them is powerfully described.

The cultivation itself of the human mind, when carried on in the best manner, is apt to be abused to the perversion of the gospel. Yet I would not put the mathematics and natural philosophy on the same footing as the platonic or stoical doctrines. In truth, for these last, philosophy is too good a name ; they had little, as they were conducted by the school of Ammonius or by Antoninus, that deserved the attention of a wise man. The philosophy of the moderns, when applied either to quantity or to the works of nature, is doubtless possessed of truth and solidity ; that of the ancients was false and romantic. Yet great care is requisite to keep even modern philosophy within its bounds, and to prevent its mixture with christianity ; and the danger of being elated by pride, and of being made too wise for the teaching of God's Holy Spirit, is common to it, with all other sorts of secular knowledge. As to moral philosophy and metaphysics, they seem, in point of danger to religion, to harmonize more with ancient philosophical evils. Even great and fatal mistakes in religion may be made through their means. In general, setting aside a very small portion of natural truths which are agreeable to the moral sense and conscience of mankind, they seem, as they have been generally managed, the very same sort of evils as those which the apostle to the Colossians speaks against. His guard against philosophy is equally applicable to *them* ; and as they militate generally against the vital truths of

christianity, undoubtedly the cultivation of them has corrupted the gospel in our times, as much as the cultivation of more ancient philosophy corrupted it in early ages. Indeed whatever pretends to incorporate with the gospel, and is yet not christian, *must* do mischief by the effect of the combination, however speciously it may address itself to the reason of man, prejudiced by self-conceit and the love of sin.

And here we shut up the view of the second century, which, for the most part, exhibited proofs of divine grace as strong, or nearly so, as the first. We have seen the same unshaken and simple faith of Jesus, the same love of God and of the brethren, and that in which they singularly excelled modern christians, the same heavenly spirit and victory over the world. But a dark shade is enveloping these divine glories. The Spirit of God is grieved already by the ambitious intrusions of self-righteousness, argumentative refinements, and pharisaic pride ; and though it be more common to represent the most sensible decay of godliness as commencing a century later, to me it seems already begun. Yet the effects of the first out-pouring of the Spirit, and some rich communications of the same Spirit will appear in the third century.

CENTURY III.

CHAPTER I.

Irenæus.

BEFORE we proceed with the orderly course of events in this century, it may be convenient to continue the account of authors belonging to the last, whose deaths happened within this. We meet with four celebrated men of this description ; Irenæus, Tertullian, Pantænus, and Clement of Alexandria.

Of Irenæus it were to be wished we had a more copious account. The place of his birth is quite uncertain. His name, however, points him out to be a Grecian. His instructors in christianity were Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, and the renowned Polycarp. The former is generally allowed to have been a man of real sanctity, but of slender capacity. He, as well as Polycarp, had been a disciple of St. John, and with all the imbecility of judgment which is ascribed to him, might, under God, have been of signal service to Irenæus. But the instructions of Polycarp seem to have made the deepest impression on his mind from early life.

The church of Lyons, we have seen, was a daughter of the church of Smyrna, or of the other neighbouring churches. Pothinus must have been a Greek as well as Irenæus ; who as presbyter assisted the venerable prelate in his old age. His concern in writing the account of the martyrdoms of Lyons has been already mentioned. After the death of Pothinus, about the year 169, he succeeded him. Never was any pastor more severely tried by a tempestuous scene. Violent persecution without, and subtile heresies within, called for the exertion, at once, of consummate dexterity and of magnanimous resolution. Irenæus was favoured

with a large measure of both, and weathered out the storm. But heresy proved a more constant enemy than persecution. The multiplication of it in endless refinements induced him to write his book against heresies, which must have been at that time a very seasonable work. His vigour and charity also in composing the insignificant disputes about Easter have been noticed.

The beginning of the third century was marked with the persecution under Septimius Severus, the successor of Julian. He himself had most probably directed the persecution at Lyons, in which Pothinus suffered, and when he began to persecute as emperor, he would naturally recall the idea of Lyons, and of the persecution in which he had so large a share.* Gregory of Tours, and the ancient martyrologists inform us, that after several torments Irenæus was put to death, and together with him almost all the christians of that populous city, whose numbers could not be reckoned, so that the streets of Lyons flowed with the blood of christians. We may easily allow that this is a rhetorical exaggeration. Yet I see no reason with some to deny the truth of this second persecution at Lyons, and of Irenæus suffering martyrdom under it. Gregory of Tours is not the best authority, but there is no circumstance of improbability here. The silence of Eusebius affords no argument to the contrary, because he is far from relating the deaths of all celebrated christians. Of those in the west particularly, he is by no means copious in his narrative, and the natural cruelty of Severus, added to his former connexion with Lyons, gives to the fact a strong degree of credibility.

The labours of Irenæus in Gaul were doubtless of the most solid utility. Nor is it a small instance of the humility and charity of this great man, accurately versed as he was in Grecian literature, that he took pains to learn the barbarous dialect of Gaul, conformed himself to the rustic manners of an illiterate people, and renounced the politeness and elegant traits of his own country, for the love of souls. Rare fruit of christian

* Cave's life of Irenæus.

charity ! and highly worthy the attention of pastors in an age like this, in which so many undertake to preach christianity, and yet distinguish themselves in any thing rather than in what peculiarly belongs to their office !

His book of heresies is nearly the whole of his writings that have escaped the injuries of time. His assiduity and penetration are equally remarkable in analyzing and dissecting all the fanciful schemes, with which heretics had disgraced the christian name. It is easy to see that his views of the gospel are in the same style as those of Justin,* whom he quotes, and with whose works he appears to have been acquainted. Like him he is silent, or nearly so, on the election of grace, which from the instructors of his early age he must often have heard. And like him he defends the Arminian notion of free-will, and by similar arguments.† His philosophy seems to have had the same influence on his mind, to darken some truths of scripture, and to mix the doctrine of Christ with some human inventions.

There is not much of pathetic, practical, or experimental religion in the work. The author's plan, which led him to keep up a constant attention to speculative errors, did not admit it. Yet there is every where so serious and grave a spirit, and now and then such displays of godliness, as shew him very capable of writing what might have been singularly useful to the church in all ages.

He makes a strong use of the argument of tradition in support of the apostolical doctrine against the novel heresies. His acquaintance with primitive christians gave him a great right to press this argument, and the force of it in a certain degree is obvious. The papists have perverted these declarations of his into an argument in favour of their church. But what may not men pervert and abuse ? The reasonable use of tradition; as a collateral proof of christian doctrines, is not hence invalidated. What he observes here concerning

* B. 4. ch. 14.

† B. 4. ch. 72.—quia in nobis sit, seems equivalent to Justin's
 ΝΥΤΕΞΘΙΝ.

the barbarous nations is remarkable.* “If there was any doubt concerning the least article, ought we not to have recourse to the most ancient churches where the apostles lived? But what would it signify if the apostles had left us no writings? Ought we not to follow the tradition which they left to those with whom they committed the care of the churches? It is what several barbarous nations observe, who believe in Jesus without paper or ink, having the doctrine of salvation written on their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and faithfully keeping up to ancient tradition concerning one God the Creator and his Son Jesus Christ. Those who have received this faith without scripture, are barbarians as to their manner of speaking, compared with us; but as to their sentiments and behaviour, they are very wise and very agreeable to God, persevering in the practice of justice and charity. And if any one should preach to them in their language, what the heretics have invented, they would immediately stop their ears and flee far off, and would not even hear those blasphemies.”

Thus it appears that to the illiterate barbarians tradition, though a poor substitute, supplied the place of the written word. We may not, however, suppose that their faith was blind and implicit. Our author gives a strong testimony to their godliness, and those of them who were taught indeed of God would have in themselves the strongest and most reasonable of all proofs of the divinity of their religion. Of the Holy Spirit's influences, and of the native energy of divine truth on the hearts and lives of very illiterate men, we seem to have here a very valuable testimony.

There is no new thing under the sun; the artifices of the Valentinians in alluring men to their communion are specimens of the wiles of heretics in all ages.† “In public they use alluring discourses, because of the common christians, as they call those who wear the christian name in general; and to entice them to come often,

* B. 3. ch. 4.—See Fleury's Church History on the subject of the Works of the Fathers, vol. i. b. 4.

† B. 3. ch. 15.

they pretend to preach like us ; and complain that though their doctrine be the same as ours, we abstain from their communion, and call them heretics. When they have seduced any from the faith by their disputes, and made them willing to comply with them, they begin to open their mysteries.”

He doubtless agrees with all the primitive christians in the doctrine of the Trinity, and makes use of the 45th psalm particularly to prove the deity of Jesus Christ. He is no less clear and sound in his views of the incarnation ;* and, in general, notwithstanding some philosophical adulterations, he certainly maintained all the essentials of the gospel.

The use of the mystic union between the godhead and manhood of Christ in the work of redemption, and in general the *fall* and the *recovery*, are scarce held out more instructively by any writer of antiquity. The learned reader, who has a taste for what is peculiarly christian, will not be displeased to see a few quotations.†

“He united man to God ; for if man had not overcome the adversary of man, the enemy could not have been legally conquered. And again, if God had not granted salvation, we should not have been put into firm possession of it ; and if man had not been united to God, he could not have been a partaker of immortality. It behoved then the Mediator between God and man, by his affinity with both, to bring both into agreement with each other.

‡ “The all-powerful Word of God, and perfect in righteousness, justly set himself against the apostacy, redeeming his own property from him (Satan) not by violence, as he bore rule over us from the beginning, insatiably making rapine of what was not his own. But the Lord, redeeming us with his own blood, and giving his life for our life, and his flesh for our flesh, effected our salvation.”

* C. 6. b. v. 14.

† B. 3. 20.

‡ L. 5. c. 1.

He beautifully expresses our recovery by a recapitulation in Christ.* “Our Lord would not have gathered up these things in himself, had he not been made flesh and blood according to the original creation of man, saving in himself in the end what had perished in the beginning of Adam. He therefore had flesh and blood, not of another kind, but gathering into himself the very original creation of the Father, he sought that which was lost.”†

Undoubtedly the intelligent, scriptural reader will recollect the divine reasoning of the author to the Hebrews very similar to all this. And those who see how well the views of Irenæus are supported by him, will know how to judge of the opinions of those who call this scholastic theology, will see how accurately the primitive fathers understood and maintained the doctrines now deemed fanatical, and will observe the propriety of being zealous for christian peculiarities. One short quotation shall conclude this account of the book of heresies.

“The Word of God, Jesus Christ, on account of his immense love, became what we are, that he might make us what he is.”—Book 5, Preface.

Of the few fragments of this author there is nothing that seems to deserve any particular attention, except that of an Epistle to Florinus, whom he had known in early life, and of whom he had hoped better things than those into which he was afterwards seduced. “These doctrines, says he, those who were presbyters before us, those who had walked with the apostles, did not deliver to you. For I saw you, when I was a boy, in the lower Asia, with Polycarp, carrying a very splendid appearance in the Emperor’s service, and desirous of being approved of by him. For I choose rather to mention things that happened at that time than facts of a later date. For the instructions of our childhood,

* *ανακεφαλαιωσις*. Eph. i. 10.—See Dr. Owen’s Preface to his “*Χριστολογία*.”

† B. 5. ch. 14

growing with our growth, adhere to us most closely, so that I can mention the very spot in which Polycarp sat and expounded, and his coming in and going out, and the very manner of his life, and the figure of his body, and the sermons which he preached to the multitude, and how he described to us his converse with John, and with the rest of those who had seen the Lord, how he related to us their expressions and what things he had heard from them of the Lord, and of his miracles and of his doctrine. As Polycarp had received from the eye-witnesses of the Word of Life, he told us all things agreeable to the scriptures. These things then, through the mercy of God visiting me, I heard with seriousness, writing them not on paper, but on my heart, and ever since, through the grace of God, I have a genuine remembrance of them, and I can witness before God, that if that blessed apostolical presbyter had heard any such thing, he would have cried out and stopped his ears, and in his usual manner have said, "O good God, to what times hast thou reserved me, that I should endure these things!" And he would immediately have fled from the place in which he had heard such doctrines."

How superficially numbers in this, which calls itself an enlightened age, are content to think, appears from the satisfaction with which two confused lines of a poet, great indeed as a poet, but very ill informed in religion, are constantly quoted :

For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight ;
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right.

Those to whom these lines appear full of oracular wisdom, may call Irenæus a graceless zealot if they please. But those, in every age, to whom evangelical truth appears of real importance, will regret that so little of this zeal, "*in earnestly contending for the faith which was once delivered to the saints,*" appears in our times, because they think it absolutely necessary to preserve even practical christianity in the world.

CHAPTER II.

Tertullian.

WE have not yet had any occasion to take notice of the state of christianity in the Roman province of Africa. This whole region, once the scene of Carthagenian greatness, abounded with christians in the second century, though of the manner of the introduction of the gospel and of the proceedings of its first planters we have no account. In the latter part of the second and in the former part of the third century there flourished at Carthage the famous Tertullian, the first latin writer of the church whose works are come down to us. Yet were it not for some light which he throws on the state of christianity in his own times, he would not deserve to be distinctly noticed. I have seldom seen so large a collection of treatises, all professedly on christian subjects, containing so little matter of useful instruction. The very first tract in the volume, that de Pallio, shews the littleness of his views. The dress of the Roman *Toga* offended him; he exhorted christians to wear the *Pallium*, a more vulgar and rusty kind of garment, as more worthy of their religion. All his writings betray the same sour, monastic, harsh, and severe turn of mind. “*Touch not, taste not, handle not,” might seem to have been the maxims of his religious conduct. The apostle there warns christians against will-worship and voluntary humility, and shews that while the flesh outwardly appears to be humbled, it is inwardly puffed up by these things, and induced to forsake the head, Christ Jesus. The subtile spirit of self-righteousness may, in all likelihood, in Tertullian’s time, have very much overspread the African church, or his writings would scarce have rendered him so celebrated amongst them.

* Coloss. 11.

All his religious ideas seem tinged deeply with the same train of thinking ; his treatise of repentance is meagre and dismal throughout, and while it enlarges on outward things, and recommends the rolling of our bodies before the priests, is very slight on the essential spirit of repentance itself.

A christian soldier had refused to wear a crown of laurel which his commander had given him with the rest of the regiment, was punished for it, and blamed by the christians of those times, because his conduct had a tendency to irritate needlessly the reigning powers. I am apt to think that he might have worn it as innocently as St. Paul committed himself to a ship whose sign was Castor and Pollux. It was a merely military ornament, and could no more be said to have any connexion with idolatry, than almost every custom of civil life must have had at that time. The apostle, I think, would have accused the soldier of disobedience to his lawful superiors, and might have referred christians to his own determination in the case of eating things sacrificed to idols, *eat of such things as they set before you, asking no questions for conscience sake*. But Tertullian decides on the other side of the question, and applauds the disobedience of the soldier. His reasons are dishonourable to his understanding. He owns that there is no scripture to be found against compliance in this case. Tradition he thinks a sufficient reason for contumacy, and then mentions some traditional customs maintained in the African churches, among which the very frequent signing of themselves with the sign of the cross is one.

Superstition had made, it seems, deep inroads into Africa. It was rather an unpolished region, and much inferior to Italy in point of civilization. Satan's temptations are suited to tempers and situations. But surely it was not by superstitious practices that the glad tidings of salvation had been first introduced into Africa. There must have been a deep decline. One of the strongest proofs that the comparative value of the christian religion in countries is not to be estimated by

their distance from the apostolic age, is deducible from the times of Tertullian. If I be spared to proceed, we shall see Africa exhibit a much more pleasing spectacle.

All this man's casuistical determinations savour of the same asperity. He approved not of flight in persecution, in direct contradiction to our Saviour's determination.* He takes notice of a martyr named Rutilius, who, having fled several times from place to place to avoid persecution, and saved himself by money, was suddenly seized and carried before the governor, when he thought himself secure, and finished his martyrdom by fire, having undergone several torments.

I had much rather quote Tertullian as an historian than as a reasoner. We may make useful reflections on this fact, without concerning ourselves with his inferences.

He disapproved also, at least after his separation from the church, of second marriages, and called them *adultery*. For as he does not appear to have been much acquainted with the depravity, misery, and imbecility of human nature, most of his precepts carry rather a stoical than a christian appearance. He was, in his own nature, doubtless a man of great natural fortitude, and most probably of great strength of body, as he lived to an advanced age. He seems not to have had any thing of that sympathy with the weak, which forms so beautiful a part of the christian character. The church in general was not severe enough, according to his ideas of discipline; yet it must be confessed they were by no means wanting in that respect. In our licentious times, when sloth and dissipation, the very opposite extremes to those which pleased the genius of Tertullian, abound, all who love the ways of Christ regret that discipline is at so low an ebb.

The montanists, whose austerities were extreme, and whose enthusiasm was real, seduced at length our severe African, and he not only joined them, but wrote in their defence, and treated the body of christians

* Matthew x. 23.

from whom he separated with much contempt. I have the satisfaction as yet to find, that the largest body of christians, so called, was the soundest.

Tertullian, we are told, resented some treatment which he met with from some Roman christians. But of this I know no particulars ; only this was said to have influenced his secession from the church. Error, however, is very inconstant : He, in a great measure, left the montanists afterwards, and formed a sect of his own, called tertullianists, who continued in Africa till Augustin's time, by whose labours their existence, as a sect, was brought to a close. The character of Tertullian is very strongly delineated by himself in his own writings. Had there been any thing peculiarly christian which he had learnt from the montanists, his works would have shewn it ; but they are all of the same uniformly sable complexion ; nor does he seem to have improved in any thing but in severity.

It is but an unpleasing picture which truth has obliged me to draw of this man. One agreeable circumstance attending his history is this ; that it was not on account of any fundamental error in principle, that he left the church. The faith of Christ, and the practice of real godliness was in it, beyond doubt, to a much greater degree than in the heretics of those times, if it be allowed and hoped, as it ought to be, that some good persons might be amongst them. The abilities of Tertullian, as an orator and a scholar, are far from being contemptible, and have doubtless given him a reputation to which his theological knowledge by no means entitles him. Yet the man seems always in good earnest, and therefore much more estimable than thousands who would take a pleasure in despising him, while they themselves are covered with profaneness. It is not for us to condemn, after all, a man who certainly honoured Christ, defended several fundamental christian doctrines, took large pains in supporting what he took to be true religion, and ever meant to serve God. He might even in his latter days, if not before, be favoured with that humbling and transforming knowledge of

Christ, which might fit him for the enjoyment of the kingdom of heaven. Superstition and enthusiasm are compatible with real godliness ; profaneness is not so. It were to be wished, that those, who are most interested in this remark, were more disposed to attend to it than they generally are.

In his treatise against Praxeas, he appears to have very clear and sound views of the doctrine of the Trinity. He speaks of the Trinity in Unity "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, yet one God." He speaks of the Lord Jesus as both God and man, Son of man and Son of God, and called Jesus Christ. He speaks also of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Sanctifier of the faith of those who believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He observes that this rule of faith had obtained from the beginning of the gospel, antecedent to any former heretics, much more to Praxeas, who was of yesterday. To those who know the primitive times I need not say, that Tertullian's own heresy lessens not the credibility of his testimony to these things. His montanism altered not in the least his view of the Trinity.

The heresy of Praxeas consisted in making the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all one and the same. The distinction of persons in the Godhead was denied by him. This is no other than what has since been better known by the name of Sabellianism. No doubt the mystery of the Trinity is this way removed ; but then what becomes of the divine revelation itself ; all attempts to subvert the faith of scripture, on this subject, labour under the same error, a desire to accommodate divine truths, which require the submission of our reason, to our narrow faculties, and to strip the Almighty of his attribute of incomprehensible. Tertullian informs us that Praxeas first brought this evil from Asia into the Roman world, and seduced many, but at last was confuted and silenced by "an instrument whom God pleased to make use of," a modest periphrasis, I apprehend, for himself, and the evil seemed eradicated. Even Praxeas himself had the ingenuousness to retract his mistake, and his hand-writing still remains among the natural men

(so Tertullian calls the christians in general from whom he had separated) and he no more revived his heresy. Others revived it *afterwards*, which occasioned the treatise whence I have extracted this brief account.

In his Apology, the eloquence and argumentative powers of our author appear most conspicuous. He refutes, in the usual manner, the stale, heathen calumnies of christians feeding on infants. The remarkable power of christians over demons he states in the same manner as various of the fathers have done. He appeals to the consciences of mankind, and a common practice even among idolaters founded on it, as a proof of the unity of the Godhead. His description is remarkably striking. "What God hath given," was an universal mode of speaking. In appealing to God, to say, "God sees it, and I recommend to God, and God will restore to me. O testimony of the soul, naturally in favour of christianity; and when men seriously pronounce these words, they look not to the capitol, but to heaven. For the soul knows the seat of the living God, whence it had its own origin." I scarce remember a finer observation made by any author in favour both of the natural voice of conscience and of the patriarchal tradition of true religion; for both may fairly be supposed concerned in the support of this practice. It shews how difficult it was for satan to eradicate entirely every vestige of truth; and every classical reader may observe how common it is for the Pagan writers to speak of God as one, when they are most serious, and instantly to slide into the vulgar polytheism when they begin to trifle.

It is a beautiful view of the manners and spirit of the christians of his time, which this Apology exhibits. A few quotations may illustrate the subject, and serve to shew what real christianity does for men.

"We pray, says he, for the safety of the emperors to the eternal God, the true, the living God, whom emperors themselves would desire to be propitious to them above all others who are called gods. We, looking up to heaven with out-stretched hands, because they

are harmless, with naked head, because we are not ashamed, without a prompter, because we pray from the heart, constantly pray for all emperors, that they may have a long life, a secure empire, a safe house, strong armies, a faithful senate, a well-moralized people, a quiet state of the world, whatever Cæsar would wish for himself in his public and private capacity. I cannot solicit these things from any other than from Him from whom, I know, I shall obtain them, because he alone can do these things, and I am he who may expect them of him, being his servant, who worship him alone, and lose my life for his service. Thus then let the hoofs pierce us, while our hands are stretched out to God, let crosses suspend us, let fires consume us, let swords pierce our breasts, let wild beasts trample on us, a praying christian is in a frame for enduring any thing. Act in this manner, ye generous rulers; kill the soul who supplicates God for the emperor. Were we disposed to return evil for evil, it were easy for us to revenge the injuries which we sustain. But God forbid that his people should vindicate themselves by human fire, or be reluctant to endure that by which their sincerity is evinced. Were we disposed to act the part, I will not say of secret assassins, but of open enemies, should we want forces and numbers? Are we not dispersed through the world? It is true we are but of yesterday, and yet we have filled all your places, cities, islands, castles, boroughs, councils, camps, courts, palaces, senate, forum. We leave you only your temples. To what war should we not be ready and well prepared, even though unequal in numbers, we who die with so much pleasure, were it not that our religion requires us rather to suffer death than to inflict it? Were we to make a general secession from your dominions, you would be astonished at your solitude.

We are dead to all ideas of honour and dignity; nothing is more foreign to us than political concerns. The whole world is our republic.

We are a body united in one bond of religion, discipline, and hope. We meet in our assemblies for pray-

er. We are compelled to have recourse to the divine oracles for caution and recollection on all occasions. We nourish our faith by the Word of God, we erect our hope, we fix our confidence, we strengthen our discipline by repeatedly inculcating precepts, exhortations, corrections, and excommunication, when it is needful. This last, as being in the sight of God, is of great weight, and is a strong prejudice of the future judgment, if any behave in so scandalous a manner as to be debarred from holy communion. Those who preside among us are elderly persons, not distinguished for opulence, but worth of character. Every one pays into the public chest once a month, or when he pleases, and according to his ability and inclination; for there is no compulsion. These are, as it were, the deposits of piety. Hence we relieve and bury the needy, support orphans and decrepid persons, those who have suffered shipwreck, and those who, for the Word of God, are condemned to the mines, or imprisonment. This very charity of ours has caused us to be noticed by some; see, say they, how they love one another."

He afterwards takes notice of the extreme readiness with which christians paid the taxes to government, in opposition to the spirit of fraud and deceit, with which so many acted in these matters. But I must not enlarge; the reader may form an idea of the purity, integrity, heavenly-mindedness, and passiveness under injuries, for which the first christians were so justly renowned. The effect of that glorious effusion of the Divine Spirit in external things was the production of this meek and charitable conduct, and every evidence that can be desired is given to evince the truth of this account. The *confession of enemies unites here with the relations of friends.

I shall close the account of Tertullian with a few facts taken from his address to Scapula, the persecuting governor, without any remarks.

"Claudius Herminianus, in Cappadocia, vexed because his wife was become a christian, cruelly treated

* See the foregoing account of Peregrinus, page 237.

the christians. Being eaten with worms, let no one, says he, know it, lest the christians rejoice. Afterwards knowing his error, because he had by force of torments caused some to abjure christianity, he died almost a christian himself.

Cincius Severus, at Thistrum, himself taught christians how to answer so as to obtain their dismissal.

Asper having moderately tortured a person and brought him to submit, would not compel him to sacrifice, having before declared among the advocates, that he was vexed that he had any thing to do with such a cause.

The emperor Severus himself was in one part of his life kind to the christians. Proculus, a christian, had cured him of a disorder by the use of oil, and he kept him in his palace to his death, a person well known to Caracalla the successor of Severus, whose nurse was a christian. Even persons of the highest quality, of both sexes, Severus protected and commended openly against the raging populace.

Arrius Antoninus, in Asia, persecuting vehemently, all the christians of the state, presented themselves in a body, and he, leading a few to death, dismissed the rest, saying, "If you want to die, wretched men, ye may find precipices and halters."



CHAPTER III.

Pantænus.

ONE of the most respectable cities within the precincts of the Roman empire was Alexandria the metropolis of Egypt. Here the gospel had been planted by St. Mark, and from the considerable success which had attended it in most capital towns, it is probable that many were converted. But of the first pastors of this church, and of the work of God among them, we have no account. Our most distinct information begins

with what is evil. The platonic philosophers ruled the taste of this city, which piqued itself on its superior erudition. Ammonias Saccas had, as we have seen, reduced there the notions of the learned into a system, which pretended to embrace all sorts of sentiments and his successors for several ages followed his plan. We are told, that from St. Mark's time, a christian catechetical school was supported here. Whether it be so or not, Pantæus is the first master of it of whom we have any account. It should seem from a passage of Eusebius* that he was an Hebrew by descent. He had by tradition the true doctrine, received from Peter, James, John, and Paul; and no doubt he deserved this testimony of Eusebius, notwithstanding the unhappy mixture of philosophy which he imbibed in this region. For Pantæus was very much addicted to the sect of the stoics, a sort of romantic pretenders to perfection, which doctrine flattered human pride, but was surely ill adapted to our natural imbecility and the views of innate depravity. The combination of this with christianity must have debased the divine doctrine very much in the system of Pantæus; and though his instructions clouded the light of the gospel among those who were disposed implicitly to follow his dictates, yet it is not improbable, but that many of the simple and illiterate christians there might happily escape the infection, and preserve, unadulterated, the genuine simplicity of the faith of Christ, the bait of reasoning pride lies more in the way of the learned, and in all ages they are more prone to snatch at it.

Pantæus always retained the title of the stoic philosopher, after he had been admitted to eminent employments in the christian church.† For ten years he laboriously discharged the office of catechist, and freely taught all that desired him, whereas the school of his predecessors had been more private.

Some Indian ambassadors (from what part of India they came, it is not easy to determine) intreated De-

* B. 5 ch. 10.

† Cave's life of Pantæus.

metrius, then bishop of Alexandria, to send them some worthy person to preach the faith in their country. Pantænus was fixed on as the person, and the hardships he must have endured in it were doubtless great. But there were at that time * many Evangelists, who had the apostolical spirit to propagate the faith at the hazard of their lives. And as Pantænus very freely complied with this call, we have here one of the best proofs of his being possessed of the spirit of the gospel. His labours among ignorant Indians, where neither fame, nor ease, nor profit were attainable, appear to me much more substantial proofs of his godliness, than his catechetical employments at Alexandria could be. The former would oblige him to attend chiefly to christian fundamentals, and could afford little opportunity of indulging the philosophic spirit. We are told he found in India the gospel of St. Matthew, which had been carried thither by the apostle Bartholomew, who had first preached amongst them. I mention this, but much doubt the truth of it. Of the particular success of his labours we have no account; but he lived to return to Alexandria, and resumed his catechetical office. He died not long after the commencement of the third century. He used to instruct more by word than by writing. Some commentaries on the scriptures are all that are mentioned as his, and of them not a fragment remains.

Candour, I think, requires us to look on him as a sincere christian, whose fruitfulness was yet very much checked by that very philosophy for which Eusebius so highly commends him. A blasting wind it surely was, but it did not intirely destroy christian vegetation in all whom it infected. Behold now his disciple, from whom we may see more clearly what the master was, because we have more evidence concerning him. But the christian reader is prepared to expect a declension in divine things, in the state of the church before us.

* Euseb. b. 5, ch. 9.

CHAPTER IV.

Clemens Alexandrinus.

HE was, by his own confession, a scholar of Pantænus, and of the same philosophical cast of mind. He was of the eclectic sect. It is sincerely to be regretted that Clemens had any acquaintance with them ; so far as he mixed christianity with their notions, so far he tarnished it, and by his zeal, activity, learning, and reputation, at the same time that he taught many, he clouded the light of the gospel among those, who yet in fundamentals were profited by his instruction. Hear how he describes himself : * “ I espouse not this or that philosophy, not the stoic, nor the platonic, nor the epicurian, nor that of Aristotle ; but whatever any of these sects had said, that was fit and just, that taught righteousness with a divine and religious knowledge, selecting all this, I call it philosophy.”

It is evident from hence, that from the time that this philosophizing spirit had entered into the church, through Justin, it had procured to itself a respect to which its merit no way entitled it. What is there even of good ethics in all the philosophers, which Clement might not have learnt in the New Testament, and much more perfectly, and without the danger of pernicious adulterations ? Doubtless many valuable purposes are answered by an acquaintance with these writers ; but to dictate to us in religion, Clement should have known, was no part of their business : that “ the world by wisdom knew not God,” and “ beware of philosophy.” The christian world was now gradually learning to neglect these cautions, and divine knowledge is certainly much too high a term for any human doctrine whatever.

* Strom. 11. See Cave's life of Clemens.

He succeeded his master Pantænus in the catechetical school, and under him were bred the famous Origen, Alexander bishop of Jerusalem, and other eminent men. I am sorry to hear him say, that as the husbandman first waters the soil, and then casts in his seed, (the Egyptian ideas of agriculture are plainly before him) so the notions he derived out of the writings of the Gentiles served first to water and soften the earthy parts of the soul, that the spiritual seed might be the better cast in, and take vital root in the minds of men.

This certainly is not a christian dialect, nor did the apostles place Gentile philosophy in the foundation, nor believe at all that it would assist in raising the superstructure of christianity. On the contrary, they looked on philosophical religion as so much rubbish; but in all ages the blandishments of mere reason deceive us, "*vain man would be wise.*"

Besides the office of catechist, he was made presbyter in the church of Alexandria. During the persecution under Severus, most probably, he visited the east, and had a peculiar intimacy with Alexander bishop of Jerusalem. He appears to have been a holy man, and suffered imprisonment for the faith, and in that situation wrote a letter to the church of Antioch, which was carried by Clemens. Something of the spirit of christianity appears in the fragment of this letter. "Alexander, a servant of God, and a prisoner of Jesus Christ, to the blessed church at Antioch, in the Lord, greeting. Our Lord has made my bonds, in this time of my imprisonment light and easy to me; while I understood that Asclepiades, a person admirably qualified by his eminency in the faith, was by divine providence become bishop of your holy church of Antioch. These letters, brethren, I have sent by Clemens the blessed presbyter, a man of approved integrity, whom ye both do already and shall still further know; who having been here with us according to the good will of God, hath much established and augmented the church of

Christ.” From Jerusalem Clemens went to Antioch, and afterwards returned to his charge at Alexandria. The time of his death is uncertain.

The philosophy, to which he was so much addicted, would naturally darken his views of some of the most precious truths of the gospel: particularly the doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus Christ will always suffer from this connexion, the philosophers knowing no righteousness but what is infused. There is doubtless good proof of the solid piety of this learned man. Little is known of his life. But a more complete idea may be formed of his religious taste and spirit, by a few quotations.

His exhortations * to the Gentiles is a discourse written to convert the Pagans from their religion, and persuade them to embrace that of Jesus Christ. In the beginning of it he shews what difference there is between the design of Jesus Christ, and that of Orpheus, and those ancient musicians who were the first authors of idolatry, by telling us that these drew in men by their singing and the sweetness of their music, to render them miserable slaves to idols, and to make them like the very beasts, and stocks, and stones whom they adored. “Whereas Jesus Christ, who from all eternity was the the Word of God, always had a compassionate tenderness for men, and at last took their nature upon him, to free them from the slavery of demons, to open the eyes of the blind, and the ears of the deaf, to guide their paths in the way of righteousness, to deliver them from death and hell, and to bestow on them everlasting life, and to put them into a capacity of living an heavenly life here upon earth; and, lastly, that God made himself man to teach man to be like unto God.” He shews them, that eternal salvation cannot otherwise be expected, and that eternal torments cannot otherwise be avoided, but by believing in Jesus Christ, and by living conformably to his laws. “If you were permitted,” says he, “to purchase eternal salvation, what would you not give for it? And now you may obtain it by

faith and love, there is nothing can hinder you from acquiring it, neither poverty, nor misery, nor old age, nor any state of life. Believe, therefore, in one God, who is God and man, and receive eternal salvation for a recompense. Seek God, and you shall live for ever."

The candid christian sees that the fundamentals of the gospel are here laid down, as one might expect in a discourse of this nature, though not in the clearest and happiest manner. *In his *Pædagogus* he describes the word incarnate as the instructor of men; that he performs his functions by forgiving our sins as he is God, and by instructing us as he is man, with great sweetness and love; though he equally instructs all sorts, because all are children in one sense. Yet we must not look on christian doctrines as childish and contemptible: on the contrary, the quality of children which they receive in baptism† renders them perfect in the knowledge of divine things, by delivering them from sins by grace, and enlightening them with the illumination of faith; so that we are at the same time both children and men; and the milk with which we are nourished, being both the word and will of God, is very solid and substantial nourishment." Here seem to be some of his best ideas of christianity.

In his *Stromata* he speaks with his usual partiality in favour of philosophy, and shews the effect his regard for it had on his own mind, by saying that faith is God's gift, but so as to depend on our own free will. His account of the perfect christian, whom he calls *Gnosticus*, is sullied by stoical rhapsodies.‡ "He is never angry, and nothing affects him: because he always loves God, he will look upon that time as lost which he is obliged to spend in receiving nourishment, he is employed in continual and mental prayer. He is

* *Du Pin.*

† Or regeneration. The outward sign and inward spiritual grace, on account of their usual connexion in the primitive church, are used as synonymous by a number of primitive writers, which has unhappily given occasion to one of the worst abuses, from those who place all grace in form and ceremony only.

‡ *Fleury, b. 4.*

mild, affable, patient, but at the same time so rigid as not to be tempted, neither giving way to pleasure nor pain." But enough of these views. Pseudo-religionists have since his time dealt largely in these reveries, so inconsistent with that humbling sense of imbecility, and that sincere conflict against the sin of our nature, which is peculiarly christian. In truth, if his knowledge of christian doctrine was defective any where, it lay in the point of original sin. Of this his philosophers knew nothing aright ; and it must be owned he speaks of it in a confused manner at least. On the whole, such is the baneful effect of mixing things which will not incorporate, human inventions with christian truth, that this writer, learned, laborious, and ingenious as he was, in the subject of real christian knowledge and in the experience of divine things, according to the light of scripture, may seem to be far exceeded by many obscure and illiterate persons at this day ; his being a truly pious person, in the main, is no objection to this account ; it only demonstrates, in a stronger manner, the danger of admitting the pestilent spirit of human self-sufficiency to dictate in christian religion.

CHAPTER V.

The Affairs of the Church during the Reigns of Severus and Caracalla.

THE lives of the four persons, we have reviewed, seem proper to be prefixed to the general history of the third century, partly because they were studious men, not very much connected with the public state of christianity ; and partly because their views and taste in religion being known, may prepare the reader to expect that unhappy mixture of philosophical self-righteousness and superstition, which much clouded the light of the gospel in this century.

Severus, though in his younger days, it should seem, a bitter persecutor of christians at Lyons, was yet, through the influence of the kindness which he had received from Proculus, favourably disposed toward the christians. It was not till about the tenth year of his reign, which falls in with the year two hundred and two, that his native ferocity of temper brake out afresh, in kindling a very severe persecution against the christians. He was just returned victorious, from the East, against Niger, and the pride of prosperity induced him to forbid the propagation of the gospel. Christians still thought it right to obey God rather than man. Severus would be obeyed, and exercised the usual cruelties. The persecution raged every where, but particularly at Alexandria. From various parts of Egypt the christians were brought thither to suffer, and expired in torments. Of this number was Leonidas, father of the famous Origen; he was beheaded and left his son very young. Our author* selects from the letters and narrations of his friends some account of him, which it will be proper to take from his own narrative.

Lætus was at that time governor of Alexandria and the rest of Egypt, and Demetrius was just elected bishop of the christians in that city. Great numbers now suffering martyrdom, young Origen panted for the honour, and needlessly exposed himself to danger. His mother checked his imprudent zeal at first by earnest entreaties; but perceiving that he still was bent on suffering with his father, who at that time was closely confined, she very properly exercised her motherly authority by confining him to the house, and hiding from him all his apparel. The vehement spirit of Origen prompted him, when he could do nothing else, to write a letter to his father, in which he thus exhorted him, "Father, faint not, and do not be concerned on our account." He had been carefully trained in the study of the scriptures under the inspection of his pious father, who, together with the study of the liberal arts, had

* Euseb. b. 6. ch. 1.

particularly superintended this most important part of education. Even before he suffered him to be exercised in profane learning, he instructed him in scripture, and gave him daily a certain task out of it to repeat. The penetrating genius of Origen led him, in the course of his employment, to investigate the sense of scripture, and to ask his father questions beyond his ability to solve. The father checked his curiosity, reminded him of his imbecility, and admonished him to be content with the plain, grammatical sense of scripture, which obviously offered itself; but inwardly rejoiced, it seems, that God had given him such a son. And it would not have been amiss, had he rejoiced with trembling; perhaps he did so, and Origen's early loss of such a father, who probably was more simple in christian faith and piety than he himself ever was, might be an extreme disadvantage to him. Youths of great and uncommon parts, accompanied, as is generally the case, with much ambition and boundless curiosity, have often been the instruments of Satan in perverting divine truth; and it is not so much attended to as it ought to be by many truly pious and humble souls, that the superior eminence of youths, whom they respect, in parts and good sense, is by no means a prognostic of the like superiority in real spiritual knowledge and discernment in divine things. Men of genius, if they meet with encouragement, will be sure to distinguish themselves in whatever line of life they move. But persons even of remarkable endowments, though sincere in christianity, may not only in the practice, but even in the perception of gospel-truths, be far outstripped by others who are naturally much their inferiors, because the latter are by no means so exposed to the crafts of Satan, are not so liable to be warped, in their judgments, from christian simplicity, are more apt to look for understanding from above, and are less disposed to lean to an arm of flesh.

We seem to discover, in the very beginning of Origen, the foundation of that presumptuous spirit which led him afterwards to philosophize so dangerously in the

christian religion, never to content himself with plain truth, but to hunt after something singular and extraordinary, though it must be acknowledged his sincere desire of serving God appeared from early life ; nor does it ever seem to have forsaken him, so that he may be considered as having been, a child of God from early years.

His father dying a martyr, he was left an orphan, aged seventeen years, with his mother and other children, six in number. His father's substance being confiscated by the emperor, the family was reduced to great distress. But Providence gave him a friend in a rich and godly matron, who yet supported in her house a certain person of Antioch, who was noted for heresy. We cannot at this distance assign her motives for this ; but Origen, though obliged to be in his company, could not be prevailed on to join in prayer with him. He now vigorously applied himself to the improvement of his understanding ; and having no more work at school, it seems, because he soon acquired all the learning his master could give him, and finding that the business of catechizing was deserted at Alexandria, because of the persecution, he undertook the work himself, and several Gentiles came to hear him and became his disciples. He was now in his eighteenth year, and in the heat of the persecution distinguished himself by his attachment to the martyrs, not only those of his acquaintance, but in general those who suffered for christianity. He visited such of them as were fettered in deep dungeons and close imprisonment, and was present with them even after their condemnation, boldly attending them to the place of execution, to the great peril of his own life, openly embracing and saluting them, and was once in imminent danger of being stoned to death on this account. This danger of his was often repeated, insomuch that soldiers were commanded to watch about his house, because of the multitudes that crowded thither for instruction. As the persecution daily prevailed, it seemed however impossible, humanly speaking, for him to escape ; he could no longer pass safely

through the streets of Alexandria; but often changing lodgings, he was every where pursued, yet his instructions had great effect, and his zeal incited numbers to attend to christianity.

The charge of the school was now, by Demetrius the bishop, committed to him alone, and he converted it wholly into a school of religious instruction, maintaining himself by the sale of the profane books which he had been wont to study. Thus he lived many years, an amazing monument at once of industry and self-denial. Not only the day, but the greater part of the night was devoted to religious study, and he practised, with literal conscientiousness, our Lord's rules of not having two coats, nor shoes, nor providing for futurity. He was familiar with cold, nakedness, and poverty, offended many by his unwillingness to receive their gratuities, and lived many years without the use of shoes, abstained from wine, and lived so abstemiously as to endanger his life. Many imitated his excessive austerities; they were at that time honoured with the name of philosophers, and some of his followers patiently suffered martyrdom.

I state facts as I find them; a strong spirit of self-righteousness, meeting with a secret ambition, too subtle to be perceived by him who is the dupe of it, and supported by natural fortitude of mind, and the active exertion of great talents, hath enabled many in external things to seem superior in piety to men of real humility and self-diffidence, who, penetrating more happily into the genius of the gospel, by the exercise of faith in the Son of God, and that genuine charity which is its fruit, are led into a course of conduct less dazzling indeed, but much more agreeable to the gospel. One cannot form an high idea of the solid judgment of these Alexandrian christians. Were there none of the elder and more experienced christians there, who were capable, with meekness of wisdom, to correct the exuberances of this zealous youth, and to have shewn him that, by refusing the comforts of life, he affected a superiority to Paul himself, who gratefully received the alms of the

Philippians ? But this excess must have been attended with great defects in inward, vital godliness. The reader is again referred to 11 Colossians for a comment on the conduct of Origen. How much better had it been for him to have continued a scholar for sometime, before his pride was feasted by being appointed a teacher ! But the lively flow of genius seems to have been mistaken for great growth in christian knowledge and piety.

One of his scholars, called Plutarch, was led to martyrdom. Origen accompanied him, to the place of execution, the odium of the scholar's sufferings reflected on the master, and it was not without a peculiar Providence that he escaped the vengeance of the citizens. After him suffered Serenus by fire ; the third martyr was Heraclides ; the fourth Heron. The former had not yet been baptized, being only what was then called a catechumen ; the latter had been lately baptized, but both were beheaded. A second Serenus of the same school, having sustained great torments and much pain, was beheaded. A woman also, called Rais, as yet a catechumen, suffered death. Potamiæna, a young woman remarkable for beauty, purity of mind, and firmness in the faith of Christ, suffered very dreadful torments ; she was scourged very sorely by the order of Aquila the judge, who threatened to deliver her to be abused by the basest characters. But remaining still unmoved, she was led to the fire and burnt together with her mother Marcella. The heart of Basilides, a soldier, who presided at her execution, was softened. He pitied her, treated her courteously, and protected her, so far as he durst, from the insolence of the mob. She acknowledged his kindness, thanked him, and promised that after her departure she would intreat the Lord for him. Scalding pitch was poured on her whole body, which she sustained in much patience. Some time after Basilides being required of his fellow-soldiers to swear on some occasion, he refused, confessing himself a christian. They disbelieved him at first, but finding him serious, carried him before the judge, who remanded him to prison. The christians visited

him, and asking him the cause of his sudden change, he declared that Potamiæna had, three days after her martyrdom, appeared to him by night, informing him that she had performed her promise, and that he should shortly die. After this he suffered martyrdom.

The reader will think this an extraordinary story ; yet it would be rash to reject it altogether ; Eusebius lived not long after the time of Origen, had made accurate inquiries after him and his followers in Alexandria, and observes that the fame of Potamiæna was in his time very great in that province. Her martyrdom and that of the soldier seem sufficiently authentic. Her promise to pray for him after her departure only shews the gradual prevalence of fanatical philosophy, will-worship, and the like ; and if the reader is not prepared by a sufficient degree of candour to admit the truth of christian narratives, and the reality of christian grace, though pitiably stained in many instances with such superstition, he will find little satisfaction in the evidences of christian piety for many ages. But we are slaves to habit ; we make in our times great allowances for the love of the world in christians ; we are not so easily disposed to make allowances for superstitions. Yet many wrong sentiments and views may be found where the heart is devoted, in faith and love, to God and his Christ. The only difficulty remaining is, how we can apprehend that God should sanctify superstition by sending Potamiæna to appear to Basilides ? I apprehend that God being at work with his soul, the idea of the woman would naturally make a strong impression on his mind, and he might dream what he mentioned. On the whole the story seems tinged with the superstition of the times, and yet is too remarkable in christian annals to deserve to be forgotten.

An action performed about this time by Origen illustrates his character in the strongest manner. Though disposed beyond most to allegorize the scriptures, in one passage he followed the literal sense of the words too closely, “ There are some who have made them-

selves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake."* Being much conversant among women as well as men, in his work of catechizing and expounding the scriptures, he was thus at once desirous of cutting off all temptations from himself, and the slanders of infidels. But though he practised this upon himself, he took all possible pains to conceal the fact from his familiar friends.

One cannot but admire how strong self-righteous maxims and views were grown in the church; but who, except those who are lost to all sense of goodness, will not revere the piety of his motives and the fervour of his zeal? It could not however be concealed. Demetrius, his bishop, at first encouraged and commended him; afterwards † through the power of envy, on account of his growing popularity, he published the fact abroad with a view to asperse him. However the bishops of Cæsarea and Jerusalem protected and supported him, and ordained him a presbyter in the church. Day and night he continued still to labour at Alexandria. But it is time to look about into other parts of the Roman empire, and see what effects the persecution of Severus had in other places besides Alexandria.

Alexander, a bishop in Cappadocia, confessed the faith of Christ, and sustained a variety of sufferings, and yet by the providence of God was at length delivered, and travelled afterwards to Jerusalem. There he was joyfully received by Narcissus the very aged bishop of that See, a man of extraordinary piety, who associated Alexander with him in the work. Some epistles of the latter were extant in Eusebius' time, who gives us a short fragment of one of them, sufficiently authenticating the fact that those two holy men were joint pastors of Jerusalem.

"Narcissus greets you, who governed this bishopric before me, and now being an hundred and sixteen years old, prayeth with me, and that very seriously, for the state of the church, and beseeches you to be of one mind with me."

* Matthew xix. 12.

† Euseb. b. 6. c. 7.

If the ancient martyrologists had been preserved uncorrupted, they would afford us useful materials, and illustrate much the spirit and genius of real christianity in its primitive professors. But frauds, interpolations, and impostures are endless; the papal and monastic superstitions in after ages induced their supporters to corrupt these martyrologists, and indeed the writings of the fathers in general. The difficulty of procuring materials for a well-connected, credible history of real christians is hence increased exceedingly. What I cannot believe, I shall not take the trouble to transcribe; what I can, where the matter appears worthy of memory, shall be exhibited. This is the case of the martyrs of Scillita, a city of Africa, in the province of Carthage. The narration is simple, credible throughout, and worthy of the purest ages of the gospel, and the facts belong to the times of Severus.

“Twelve persons were brought before Saturninus the proconsul at Carthage, the chief of whom were Speratus, Narzal, and Cittin, and three women, Donata, Secunda, and Vestina. When they came before the proconsul he said to them all, “You may expect the emperor our master’s pardon, if you return to your senses, and observe the ceremonies of our gods.” To which Speratus replied, “We have never been guilty of any thing that is evil, nor been partakers of injustice. We have even prayed for those who persecute us unjustly; in which we obey our EMPEROR, who prescribed to us this rule of behaviour.” Saturninus answered, “We have also a religion that is simple, we swear by the genius of the emperors, and we offer up vows for their health, which you ought also to do.” Speratus answered, “If you will hear me peaceably, I will declare unto you the mystery of christian simplicity.” The proconsul said, “Shall I hear you speak ill of our ceremonies? rather swear all of you, by the genius of the emperors our masters, that you may enjoy the pleasures of life.” Speratus answered. “I know not the genius of the emperors. I serve God, who is in heaven, whom no man hath seen, nor can see. I have never been guilty of any crime punishable by

the public laws ; if I buy any thing, I pay the duties to the collectors ; I acknowledge my God and Saviour to be the Emperor of all nations ; I have made no complaints against any person, and therefore they ought to make none against me." The proconsul turning to the rest said, "Do not ye imitate the folly of this mad wretch, but rather fear our prince and obey his commands." Cittin answered, "We fear only the Lord our God, who is in heaven." The proconsul then said, "Let them be carried to prison, and put in fetters till to-morrow."

The next day the proconsul being seated on his tribunal, caused them to be brought before him, and said to the women, "Honour our prince, and do sacrifice to the gods." Donata replied, "We honour Cæsar as Cæsar ; but to God we offer prayer and worship." Vestina said, "I also am a christian." Secunda said, "I also believe in my God, and will continue stedfast to him ; and for your gods, we will not serve and adore them." The proconsul ordered them to be separated ; then, having called for the men, he said to Speratus, "Perseverest thou in being a christian ?" Speratus answered, "Yes, I do persevere ; let all give ear ; I am a christian ;" which being heard by the rest, they said, "We also are christians." The proconsul said, "You will neither consider nor receive mercy." They replied, "Do what you please, we shall die joyfully for the sake of Jesus Christ." The proconsul asked, "What books are those which you read and revere ?" Speratus replied, "The Four Gospels of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Epistles of the apostle St. Paul, and all the Scripture that is inspired of God." The proconsul said, "I will give you three days to come to yourselves." Upon which Speratus answered, "I am a christian, and such are all those who are with me, and we will never quit the faith of our Lord Jesus ; do, therefore, what you think fit."

The proconsul seeing their resolution, pronounced sentence against them, that they should die by the hands of the executioner, in these terms : "Speratus, &c. having acknowledged themselves to be christians,

and having refused to pay due honour to the emperor, I command their heads to be cut off." This sentence having been read, Speratus and the rest said, "We give thanks to God, who honoureth us this day with being received as martyrs in heaven, for confessing his name." They were carried to the place of punishment, where they fell on their knees all together, and having again given thanks to Jesus Christ, they were beheaded.*

† At Carthage itself four young catechumens were seized, Revocatus and Felicitas, slaves to the same master, with Saturninus and Secundulus, and also Vivia Perpetua, a lady of quality. She had a father, a mother, and two brothers, of whom one was a catechumen; she was married, and had a son at her breast, which she suckled herself; she was about twenty-two years of age, and was then with child. To these five Satur voluntarily joined himself by an excess of zeal too common at that time. While they were in the hands of the persecutors, the father of Perpetua, himself a Pagan, but full of affection to his favourite offspring, importuned her to fall from the faith. His intreaties were vain. Her pious constancy, to him appeared an absurd obstinacy, and enraged him so much as to induce him to give her very rough treatment. For a few days while these catechumens were under guard, but not confined in the prison, they found means to be baptized, and Perpetua's prayers were directed particularly for patience under bodily pains. They were then put into a dark prison. To the rest, more accustomed to hardships, this change of scene had nothing in it so terrible. To her, who had known nothing but the delicacies of genteel life, it was peculiarly ghastly, and her concern for her infant was extreme. Tertius and Pomponius, two deacons of the church, obtained by money, that they might go out of the dark dungeon, and for some hours refresh themselves in a more commodious place, where Perpetua gave the breast to her infant, and then recommended him carefully to her mother. For some time

* Fleury, b. 5. p. 77.

† Acta sincera, p. 86.

ner mind was devoured with concern for the distress she had brought on her family, though it was for the sake of a good conscience, but in time her spirit was more composed, and her prison became a palace.

Her father some time after came to the prison overwhelmed with grief, which, in all probability, was augmented by the reflections he made on his passionate behaviour to her at their last interview. "Have pity, my daughter," says he, "on my grey hairs; have pity on your father, if I was ever worthy of that name; if I myself have brought you up to this age, if I have preferred you to all your brethren, make me not a reproach to mankind, respect your father and your aunt (these, it seems, were joined in the interests of paganism, while the mother appears to have been a christian, otherwise his silence concerning her seems scarce to be accounted for) have compassion on your son, who cannot survive you; lay aside your obstinacy, lest you destroy us all; for if you perish, we must all of us shut our mouths in disgrace." The old gentleman, with much tenderness, kissed her hands, threw himself at her feet, weeping and calling her no longer his daughter, but his mistress. He was the only person of the family who did not rejoice at her martyrdom. Perpetua, though inwardly torn with filial affection, could offer him no other comfort than to desire him to acquiesce in the divine disposal.

The next day they were all brought before the court, and examined before vast crowds. There the unhappy old gentleman appeared with his little grandson, and taking Perpetua aside, conjured her to have some pity on her child. The procurator, Hilarian, joined in the suit, but in vain. The old man then attempted to draw his daughter from the scaffold. Hilarian ordered him to be beaten, and a blow, which he received with a staff, was felt by Perpetua very severely.

Hilarian ordered them to be exposed to the wild beasts. They then returned cheerfully to their prison. Perpetua sent the deacon, Pomponius, to demand her child of her father, which he refused to return. The

health of the child, we are told, suffered not, nor did Perpetua feel any bodily inconvenience.

Secondulus died in prison. Felicitas was eight months gone with child, and seeing the day of the public shews to be near, she was afflicted lest her execution should be deferred. Three days before the spectacles, her companions joined in prayer for her. Presently after her prayers, her pains came upon her, and she was delivered of a child, but with much difficulty. One of the door-keepers, who perhaps expected to have found in her a stoical insensibility, and heard her cries, said, "Do you complain of this? what will you do when you are exposed to the beasts?" Felicitas answered with a sagacity truly christian, "It is I that suffer now, but then there will be another with me, that will suffer for me, because I shall suffer for his sake." Her new-born daughter was delivered to a christian woman, who nursed it as her own.

The tribune, believing a report of some that the prisoners would free themselves by magical practices, treated them roughly. "Why dont you," says Perpetua, "give us some relief? Will it not be for your honour that we should appear well fed at the spectacles?"

This address of hers had the desired effect, and procured a very agreeable alteration in their treatment. The day before the shews they gave them their last meal, the martyrs did their utmost to convert it into an **αγαπη*, they ate in public; their brethren and others were allowed to visit them, and the keeper of the prison himself, by this time, was converted to the faith; they talked to the people, warned them to flee from the wrath to come, pointed out to them their own happy lot, and smiled at the curiosity of those who ran to see them. "Observe well our faces," cries Satur, with much animation, "that ye may know them at the day of judgment."

The Spirit of God was much with them on the day of trial; joy, rather than fear was painted on their looks.

* A love-feast.

Perpetua, cherished by Jesus Christ, went on with a composed countenance and an easy pace, holding down her eyes, lest the spectators might draw wrong conclusions from their vivacity. Some idolatrous habits were offered them: "We sacrifice our lives," say they, "to avoid this, and thus we have bargained with you." The tribune desisted from his demand.

Perpetua sang, as already victorious, and Revocatus, Saturninus, and Satur, endeavoured to affect the people with the fear of the wrath to come. Being come into Hilarian's presence, "Thou judgest us," say they, "and God shall judge thee." The mob was enraged, and insisted on their being scourged before they were exposed to the beasts. It was done, and the martyrs rejoiced in being conformed to their Saviour's sufferings.

Perpetua and Felicitas were stript, and put into the nets, and exposed to a wild cow. The spectators were shocked at the sight, the one being an accomplished beauty, the other newly delivered, her breasts still dropping; they drew them back and covered them with loose garments. Perpetua was first attacked, and falling on her back, she put herself into a sitting posture, and seeing her habit torn by her side, she retired to cover herself; she then gathered up her hair, that she might not seem disordered; she raised herself up, and seeing Felicitas bruised, she gave her her hand and lifted her up; then they went toward the gate, where Perpetua was received by a catechumen, called Rusticus, who attended her. "I wonder," says she, "when they will expose us to the cow;" she had been, it seems, insensible of what had passed, nor could believe it till she saw on her body and clothes the marks of her sufferings. She caused her brother to be called, and addressing herself to him and Rusticus, she said, "Continue firm in the faith, love one another, and be not offended at our sufferings."

The people insisted on having the martyrs brought into the midst of the amphitheatre, that they might have the pleasure of seeing them die; some of the martyrs rose up and went forward of their own accord, after having

given one another the kiss of charity, others received the last blow without speaking or stirring. Perpetua fell into the hands of an unskilful gladiator, who pricked her between the bones and made her cry out. She herself guided his trembling hand to her throat, and thus with the rest she slept with Jesus.

Augustine, in his exposition of the 47th psalm, taking notice of the victorious strength of divine love prevailing over all natural affections, instances the case of Perpetua,* “ We know and read thus in the sufferings of the blessed Perpetua.” He mentions the same story also in three other places in his *Treatise of the Soul*†. But it is evident that he doubts whether Perpetua herself wrote what is ascribed to her. If so, we may well doubt, and more than doubt the truth of the visions with which this excellent narrative has been intermixed, and with which I have not thought it worth while to trouble the reader. Yet the general history has every mark of authenticity, and Augustine himself published three sermons on their anniversary. It is much to be regretted that the finest monuments of ecclesiastical antiquity have been thus tarnished by mixtures of fraud or superstition. My business is not to recite these, but that alone which carries marks of truth, and Augustine’s authority has helped me to distinguish here with some degree of precision. It is needless to add any remarks; the pious reader will see, with pleasure, that God was yet with his people.

The power of God appeared evidently displayed during the course of this dreadful persecution, by the sudden and amazing conversions of several persons who voluntarily suffered death for that doctrine which they before detested. Of this we have the very respectable testimony of Origen, who, whatever other defects he be justly charged with, is certainly allowed to be of unquestionable veracity.‡

Severus would naturally extend this persecution to Gaul, the scene of his former cruelties. In fact, it was

* Tom. v. iii.

† L. 1. c. 10. 1. 3. c. 9. 1. 4. 18. tom. 7.

‡ Contra Celsum, L. 1.

now that Irenæus and many more suffered with him, and Lyons was once more dyed with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. Vivarius and Androlus, who had been sent by Polycarp here to preach the gospel, suffered death. At Comana in Pamphylia Zoticus the bishop, who had distinguished himself by writing against the Montanists, obtained the crown of martyrdom.

Now it was that some churches purchased their peace and quiet, by paying money not only to the magistrates, but also to the informers and soldiers who were appointed to search them out. The pastors of the churches approved of this proceeding, because it was only suffering the loss of their goods, and preferring that to the endangering of their souls. However an accurate casuist may decide this question, it is easily conceivable that this might be practised in real uprightness of heart by many. But it is usual with God to moderate the sufferings of his people, and not suffer them to be tried by persecution at once very long and very violent.

In the year two hundred and eleven the tyrant Severus was called hence, after a reign of eighteen years, and under his son and successor Caracalla, monster of wickedness as he proved to be, the church found repose and tranquillity.

Divine Providence had prepared for the church this mitigation of her trials, long before, in the circumstances of Caracalla's education. He had known Proculus the christian, who had recovered the health of his father, and was maintained in his palace to his death, and had himself been nursed, when an infant, by a christian woman. Though this could not win his heart to Jesus Christ, it gave him an early predilection in favour of christians, insomuch that observing, when he was seven years old, a play-fellow of his to be beaten because he followed the Jewish religion*, (the Pagan author most probably means the christian) he could not, for some time after behold with patience either his father or the father of the boy. Certainly few men have ever ex-

* Spartian's Caracalla.

ceeded him in the ferocious vices; yet, during the seven years and six months which he reigned, the christians found in him friendship and protection. Indeed for the space of thirty-and-eight years, from the death of Severus to the reign of Decius, if we except the short, turbulent interval of Maximinus, the calm of the church continued.* About the year two hundred and ten Origen came to Rome, where Zephyrinus was bishop, desirous of visiting that ancient church, but soon returned to Alexandria, and to his office of catechizing. He associated to himself Heraclas in the office of catechizing, leaving to him the instruction of the more ignorant, and giving himself up to the care of those who had made a greater proficiency. His active spirit began also to be employed in the study of the Hebrew tongue, the first fruit of which was the publication of the Hexapla. In this great work he gave the Hebrew text and the translations of the Septuagint, Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, and two others, which had long been obsolete, and whose authors were unknown. Of these interpreters Symmachus was an Ebionite, that is, he held that Christ was but a mere man,† and he inveighed against the genuine gospel of St. Matthew, for no other reason, that I can see, but on account of the clear testimony which the beginning of it affords against his heresy. These works of Origen, in addition to his constant course of labour both in writing and in preaching, are monuments at least of the most laudable industry. The evangelical reader would wish, no doubt, to see stronger signs of real christian proficiency, in experimental and practical religion, as the fruit of his labours. But we must be content with such matter as ecclesiastical materials afford us.

One Ambrose, addicted to the Valentinian heresy, an extremely fanciful and romantic scheme, not worth the trouble of an explanation, either for authors or readers, found himself confuted by Origen, and was brought over to the church. Many learned men also felt the

* Sulpitius Severus, b. 2. c. 42.

† Euseb. b. 6. ch. 16.

force of his argumentations. Heretics and philosophers attended his lectures, and he took, no doubt, a very excellent method to win their regard to himself at least, by instructing them in profane and secular learning. When philosophers pressed him with their opinions, he confuted them by arguments drawn from other philosophers, and commented on their works with so much acuteness and sagacity, as to deserve among Gentiles the reputation of a great philosopher. He encouraged many to study the liberal arts, assuring them, that they would, by that means, be much better furnished for the contemplation of holy scripture, and was entirely of opinion, that secular and philosophical institutes were very necessary and profitable for himself.

Does not the reader see how much we are already, in the course of christian annals, departed, though by insensible degrees, from christian simplicity? Here is a man looked up to with reverence as the greatest light, at least in the eastern church, a scholar himself, in his younger days, of the amphibious Ammonius, mixing christianity and philosophy, lecturing pagan philosophers, and drawing them over, in form at least, to embrace the religion of Jesus. His success among them appears very great. In their books the philosophers of those days often mention this man; some dedicate their books to him, others respectfully deliver their works to him as their master. All this Eusebius tells us with much apparent satisfaction. To him the gospel seems to have triumphed over gentilism by this means. I own I cannot but think that it was rather corrupted by gentilism. What can Origen mean by asserting the utility and even* necessity of philosophy for himself as a christian? Are not the scriptures *able to make a man wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good work?* Suppose a man of common sense, perfectly unacquainted with all the learned lore of Ammonius, to study only the sacred

books, with prayer, dependence on divine guidance and illumination, and with self-examination? Is it not conceivable that he may acquire a competent knowledge; may he not obtain an eminent knowledge of the scriptures? Certainly an acquaintance with the classics and philosophers may furnish him with strong arguments to prove the necessity and excellency of divine revelation, and deserves seriously to be encouraged in all who are to instruct others, for their improvement in taste, language, eloquence, and history. But if they are to dictate in religion, or are thought capable even of adding to the stock of theological knowledge, the scriptures (with reverence be it spoken) may seem to have been defectively written. In truth, we hear nothing now of conviction of sin, of conversion, of the influence of the Holy Spirit, of the love of Christ, among these learned converts of Origen. They are pleased with him, and superior parts and learning are sure to command the esteem of mankind. What are all the labours of Origen, which we have now before us, but vain attempts to mix things which the Holy Ghost has declared will not incorporate? One certain mischief would naturally follow; characters would be confounded; among the learned henceforward the distinction between godliness and philosophy is too faintly marked. If Origen had simply and plainly expounded to these men the peculiar and vital truths of the gospel, I cannot but suspect that many of them would have ceased to attend his instructions.

The famous Porphyry, than whom christianity had never a more acrimonious enemy, takes notice of Origen's allegorical mode of interpreting scripture, observes that he was acquainted with him when young, and bears testimony to his rapid improvements under Ammonius. He asserts, what indeed Eusebius, who must have known, contradicts, that Ammonius, though brought up a christian, turned afterwards a Gentile. He acknowledges that Origen continually perused Plato. Numenius, and the rest of the Pythagoreans; that he was well versed in Chæremon the stoic, and Cornutus,

whence he, borrowing the Grecian manner of allegorical interpretations, applied it to the Jewish scriptures.

We have seen before the wanton spirit of allegory introduced by Ammonius. It is very probable that Origen thence learnt to treat the scriptures in the same manner as Porphyry affirms. He had the candour to confess that he had been mistaken in his literal interpretation of our Saviour's words concerning the eunuchs. He afterwards learnt to allegorize all the three clauses in the passage, falling into a contrary extreme ;* and in general he unhappily introduced such a complicated scheme of fanciful interpretation, as for many ages after, through the excess of respect paid to the man, much clouded the light of scripture.

There wanted not, however, those who found fault with Origen for all this attachment to philosophy. Probably simple souls who desired to be fed with the *sincere milk of the Word, that they might grow thereby*, found themselves starved amidst all this heterogeneous doctrine. He thought himself called on to vindicate his practice, which he only does by observing the use of philosophy in confuting heretics, and by the example of Pantæus, and of Heraclas, an Alexandrian pastor, I suppose his coadjutor, who formerly had worn the common dress, and afterwards took up the philosopher's garb, and still studied earnestly the books of philosophers. What does all this prove but the epidemical progress of the disease ?

The governor of Arabia sent to Demetrius, desiring the instruction of Origen, who journeyed for that purpose into Arabia and returned to Alexandria.

The elegant publication of Minucius Felix, a work deserving even to be ranked among the Latin classics for its neatness and purity of style, was an ornament to the Latin church. The arguments against paganism are well pointed and well adapted to the state of the world at that time ; it is only to be regretted that we see not more of the real nature of christianity in the work.

In the year 214 Macrinus succeeded Caracalla, who reigned seven years and six months.

CHAPTER VI.

Christian Affairs during the Reigns of Macrinus, Heliogabalus, Alexander, Maximinus, Pupienus, Gordian, and Philip.

MACRINUS reigned not quite a year,* and was succeeded by Heliogabalus, who was slain after he had swayed the sceptre three years and nine months. He died in the year two hundred and twenty-two. His follies and vices are infamous, but he perished at the age of eighteen. The church of God suffered nothing from him, nor does he appear to have conceived any particular prejudices against it: on the contrary, he expressed a desire of removing the rites of christian worship to Rome. It is not worth while to attempt an explanation of the views of so senseless and foolish a prince. He was succeeded by his cousin Alexander, who was as yet in the sixteenth year of his age, and was one of the best moral characters in profane history.

His mother, Mammæa, is called by Eusebius a woman most godly and religious. I am at a loss how to vindicate the expression. It does not appear that she received the faith of Christ. But neither she nor her son persecuted; they rather approved and countenanced the christians. Persons of candour and probity themselves, they saw that, in ethics at least, the people of God concurred with their own views. Their conduct was laudable; but see the mischief of uniting christianity with philosophy! how cheap and common is the term godly grown in the eye of Eusebius!

The Providence of God not only secured his church from suffering, but procured it a favourable patron in

* Euseb. l. 6. Fleury, b. v. iv.

this princess and her son. The emperor had a domestic chapel, where he every morning worshipped those princes who had been placed among the gods, whose characters were most esteemed; among whom he placed Apollonius of Tyana, Jesus Christ, Abraham, and Orpheus.* He had a desire to erect a temple to Christ and to receive him into the number of the gods.

Take another instance of his candour toward the christians; a dispute was brought before him concerning the property of a piece of ground which was claimed by certain tavern-keepers, and which, having been common, the christians had occupied for a place of worship. It is fitter, said Alexander, that God should be served there, in any manner whatever, rather than a tavern should be made of it. He frequently used this christian sentence, "Do as you would be done by." He obliged a crier to repeat it when he punished any person, and was so fond of it that he caused it to be written in his palace and in the public buildings. When he was going to appoint governors of provinces, or other officers, he proposed their names in public, giving the people notice, that if they had any crime to accuse them of, they should convict them of it. It would be a shame, says he, not to do that with respect to governors, who are intrusted with men's properties and lives, which is done by Jews and christians when they publish the names of those whom they mean to ordain priests. And, indeed, by Origen's account,† the christians were very careful in the choice of their pastors, and civil magistrates were by no means to be compared with them in probity and sound morality. This prince had, it seems too much gravity and virtue for the times in which he lived, and some in derision called him Archysynagogus.

It seems to have been his plan to encourage every thing that carried the appearance of religion and virtue, and to discountenance whatever was openly immoral

* Lamprid.

† Ag. Celsus, b. iii. and viii.

and profane. His historian* tells us that he favoured astrologers, and permitted them to teach publicly; that he himself was well skilled in the vain science of the auspices, and was master of that of the augurs in a high degree.

In the year 229, Alexander was obliged to go to the east, and to reside at Antioch. His mother Mammæa went with him, and having heard of the fame of Origen, and being very curious to hear new things, she sent him a guard, and caused him to come to her. All the account we have of this interview is, that he continued there awhile, and published many things to the glory of God, and concerning the power of the heavenly doctrine, and then returned to his school at Alexandria.

What Origen taught this princess we are not told; what he ought to have taught her, the Acts of the Apostles would have amply informed him. A plain and artless declaration of the vanity and wickedness of all the reigning idolatries and philosophical sects, and what is still more of the corruption, helplessness, and misery of man and a faithful information concerning the only way of salvation by Jesus Christ, the great duty of believing on him, confessing him, and admitting the sanctifying operations of his Spirit, these things a perfectly sound preacher would have shewn her, and his exhortations would have been entirely founded on these doctrines; nor would he have found any occasion to aid his message by the authority of Plato or any other philosopher. It does not appear that any remarkable effect attended the ministry of Origen on this occasion. That he spake what he believed and what he thought most wise and expedient, I doubt not; it is only to be lamented, that his own taste and views were too similar to those of Mammæa and her son, to enable him to represent christianity to them in the clearest and the most striking manner. In truth, it is to be feared that a number of

* Lampridius.

christians so called, and Alexander himself, were much of the same religion at this time. He seems to have learnt, in some measure, the doctrine of the unity of the godhead, and by the help of the eclectic philosophy to have consolidated all religions into one mass. But things that accompany salvation will not incorporate with this plan.

The liberality of his friend Ambrose enabled Origen to prosecute his scriptural studies with vast rapidity. Ambrose himself was a deacon of the church, and by his faithfulness under persecution obtained the name of Confessor.

At this time Noetus of Smyrna propagated the same heresy in the east, which Praxeas had done in the west, that there was no distinction between the divine persons. The pastors of the church of Ephesus, to which he belonged, summoned him before them, and asked whether he really maintained this opinion. At first he denied it; but afterwards, having formed a party, he became more bold, and publicly taught his heresy. Being again interrogated by the pastors, he said, "What harm have I done? I glorify none but one God; I know none besides him who hath been begotten, who suffered and died." He evidently in this way confounded the persons of the Father and the Son together; and being obstinate in his views, was ejected out of the church with his disciples. We have here an additional proof of the jealousy of the primitive christians in support of the fundamental articles of christianity, and the connexion indissolubly preserved between heretical pravity and pride of heart appeared also in this man. He called himself Moses and his brother Aaron.*

Origen was now sent for to Athens to assist the churches, who were there disturbed with several heresies. From thence he went to Palestine. At Cæsarea Theoctistus the bishop, and Alexander bishop, of Jerusalem, ordained him a priest at the age of forty-five, about the year 230. Demetrius, his own bishop, was

* Fleury, b. 5. Epiphanius and Theodoret.

offended, and at length divulged what had hitherto been kept very secret, the indiscreet mutilation which Origen had committed in his youth. Alexander defended himself in what he had done by the encomium which Demetrius had given of Origen in his letter. The latter on his return to Alexandria found his bishop quite incensed against him, who procured him to be even ejected from the church by a council of pastors on account of some errors that appeared in his works. What judgment is to be formed of these errors I shall have a future occasion to consider. Banished from Egypt, this great man lived now in Palestine with his friends, Theoctistus and Alexander, still followed by many disciples, and particularly respected by Firmilian of Cappadocia, who looked upon it as a happiness to enjoy his instructions. Here also the famous Gregory Thaumaturgus attended his theological lectures, which were still delivered in Origen's usual manner.

Demetrius, bishop of Alexandria, died, after having held that office forty-three years. A long space! but our informations are too indistinct to enable us to know his real character. His treatment of Origen needed surely a very upright conscience toward God in things of essential moment to justify it. Origen's assistant Heraclas succeeded him.

In the year 235 Alexander was murdered together with his mother, and Maximin the murderer obtained the empire. His malice against the house of Alexander disposed him to persecute the christians, and he gave orders to put to death the pastors of churches; nor was the persecution confined to them; others suffered with them, and it seems by Firmilian's letter to Cyprian of Carthage, that the flame extended to Cappadocia. Ambrose, the friend of Origen, and Protocetus, minister of Cæsarea, suffered much in the course of it, and to them Origen dedicated his book of martyrs. He himself was obliged to retire. But the tyrant's reign lasted only three years, in which time it must be confessed that the rest of the world had tasted of his ferocity as much as the christians. His persecu-

tion of them had been local, and his cruelties to all mankind insatiable.

Pupienus and Balbinus, the successors of Maximin, were slain in the year 238, and Gordian reigned for six years, and was then supplanted by the usual military turbulence to make way for his murderer, Philip the Arabian.

Origen, in a letter to his scholar, Gregory Thaumaturgus, lays down a rule for studying the scriptures, which shews that his philosophy had not obliterated his christianity. He exhorts him to apply himself chiefly to the Holy Scripture, to read it very attentively; not to speak or judge of it lightly, but with unshaken faith and prayer, which, says he, is absolutely necessary for understanding it.

A fresh attempt was now made to pervert the doctrine of the person of Christ. Beryllus, bishop of Bostra in Arabia, affirmed that our Saviour, before his incarnation, had no proper divinity, but only his Father's divinity dwelling in himself. Thus Eusebius states the matter. It is not easy to form any clear ideas at all of his sentiments; they seem, however, to annihilate the divine personality of the eternal Word. The man, it seems, was not obstinate, he listened to sound scriptural argument, and was therefore reclaimed by means of Origen. He even loved his instructor ever after, and was sincerely thankful to him, a circumstance which reflects an amiable light on the character of Beryllus.*

Philip began to reign in the year 244. Eusebius tells us that he was a christian, and desirous of being received into the church as such, but was obliged by the bishop to join himself to those who for their sins were examined and put into the room of penitents. But what bishop? Babylas of Antioch is mentioned by Chrysostom long after. But Eusebius mentions the whole story only as a report, it is void of proper authenticity. That he was a christian by profession seems well attested by the concurrent voice of

* Hieronym. Eccle. Scrip. l. xx.—See Dr. Waterland on the Importance of the Trinity.

antiquity, though most probably he ranked only at his death as a catechumen. But that he could conduct the secular games, full of idolatry as they were, which took place in the fourth year of his reign, and in the year of Christ 247, shewed that he was not disposed to give up any thing for the sake of Christ. There is not the least appearance that he was cordial in his profession of the gospel. In the mean time its progress in the world must have been very great to induce a worldly-minded man like Philip to countenance it. To him also, and to his wife Severa, Origen wrote an epistle, which was extant in Eusebius' time.

By Origen's account in one of his homilies, it appears that the long peace which the church (with only the short interruption of Maximin's persecution) had enjoyed, had brought on a great degree of lukewarmness and even much religious indecorum among them. Let the reader only observe the difference between the scenes he here describes and the conduct of the christians both in the first and second century, and he will feel the greatness of the declension.

*“Several, says he, come to church only on solemn festivals, and then not so much for instruction as for diversion ; some go out again as soon as they have heard the lecture, without conferring or asking the pastors any questions ; others stay not till the lecture is ended, and others know not whether there is any such thing, but entertain themselves in a corner of the church.”

If any thing under God can conquer this careless spirit, it must be the faithful dispensation of the peculiar truths of the gospel in a practical, soul-searching manner. But the ability for this was much declined, in the eastern part of the church especially. He complains elsewhere of the ambitious and haughty manners of pastors, and of the wrong steps which some took to obtain *preferments*.

* Fleury.

This great man was now once more employed in confuting another error in Arabia ; it was of those who denied the intermediate state of souls ; and this he managed with his usual good success.*

Philip enjoyed the fruits of his crimes five years, and was then slain and succeeded by Decius. A little before his death, in the year 248, Cyprian was chosen bishop of Carthage. But in naming him a star of the first magnitude, in these days, has been mentioned ; and after the fatigue of hunting out a little of christian goodness with much difficulty, it will not be amiss to recreate ourselves with the contemplation of a character partaking indeed of the declensions of these times, but far superior, in real simplicity and piety, I apprehend, to those in the east which we have reviewed.

CHAPTER VII.

The Conversion of Cyprian.

THE life of this man was written by Pontius his deacon. It is to be regretted, that one who must have known him so well, should have written in so incompetent a manner. Very little distinct information is to be gathered from him ; but his own letters are extant, and from them I shall endeavour to exhibit whatever is of the greatest moment. They are, in truth, a valuable treasure of ecclesiastical history : the spirit, taste, discipline, and habits of the times, among christians, are strongly delineated ; nor have we in all this century any account to be compared with them. He was a professor of oratory in the city of Carthage, and a man of wealth, quality, and dignity. Cæcilius, a Carthaginian presbyter, had the felicity, under God, to conduct him to the knowledge of Christ, and in

* Euseb. b. 6. 36.

his gratitude Cyprian afterwards assumed the præ-nomen of Cæcilius. His conversion was about the year 246, two years before he was chosen bishop of Carthage. About thirteen years was the whole scene of his christian life. But God can do great things in a little time, or to speak more nervously with the sacred writer, "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years." He did not proceed by slow, painful steps of argumentation, but seems to have been led on with vast rapidity by the effectual operation of the Divine Spirit, and happily, in a great measure at least, to have escaped the shoals and quicksands of false learning and self-conceit, which we have seen so much to tarnish the character of his eastern brethren. Faith and love seem in native simplicity to have possessed him when an early convert. He saw with pity the poor of the flock, and he knew no method so proper of employing the unrighteous mammon as to relieve their distress.* He sold whole estates for their benefit.

It was an excellent rule of the apostle's concerning ordination, "Not a novice, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil." There appeared however in Cyprian a spirit at once so simple, so zealous, and so intelligent, that in about two years after his conversion he was chosen presbyter and then bishop of Carthage.

It was no feigned virtue that advanced him thus in the eyes of the people. The love of Christ evidently preponderated in him above all secular considerations. His wife opposed his christian spirit of liberality in vain. The widow, the orphan, and the poor, found in him a sympathizing benefactor continually. The presbyter Cæcilius must have beheld with much delight the growing virtues of his pupil, and dying recommended to his care his wife and children. It was with much reluctance that Cyprian observed the designs of the people to choose him for their bishop. He retired to avoid their solicitations, his house was besieged, and his retreat rendered

* Pontius Vit. Cyp.

impossible. He yielded at length to accept of the painful pre-eminence. For so he soon found it. Yet five presbyters were enemies to his exaltation. His lenity, patience, and benevolence toward them was remarked by all.

Pontius tells us that he did many things before he was chosen bishop. Indeed a spirit active like his must be employed. But he does not oblige us with the communication of any of his works. His letter to Donatus may safely be placed within this period, as St. Austin tells us it was his first work. Part of this, as it will illustrate his conversion, and shew the spirit of a man penetrated with divine love, and lately recovered from the idolatry of the world, well deserves to be translated. "I find your whole care and concern at present is for conversion: you look at me, and expect from me in your affection what I am afraid I cannot by any means answer. Small fruits must be expected from my meanness; yet I will attempt, for the subject matter is on my side. Let plausible arts of ambition be used in courts; but when we speak of the Lord God, plainness and sincerity, not the powers of eloquence should be used. Hear then things not eloquent, but strong; not courtly, but rude; yet proper to celebrate the divine goodness. Hear then what is felt before it is learnt, and is not collected by a long course of speculation, but is imbibed by the soul, by the compendium of grace ripening her as at once.

"While I lay in darkness and the night of paganism, and when I fluctuated uncertain and dubious with wandering steps in the sea of a tempestuous age, ignorant of my own life, alienated from light and truth, it appeared to me a harsh and difficult thing, as my manners then were to obtain what divine grace had promised, that a man should be born again; and that, being animated with the love of regeneration by a new life, he should strip himself of what he was before, and though the body remained the same, he should in his mind, become altogether a new creature.* How can so great a change

* An instance we have here of the powerful effects of regeneration attending baptism in those days.

be possible, said I, that a man should suddenly and at once put off what nature and habit have confirmed in him. These evils are deeply and closely fixed in us. How shall he learn parsimony who has been accustomed to expensive and magnificent feasts? And how shall he who has been accustomed to purple, gold, and costly attire, condescend to the simplicity of a plebeian habit? Can he who was delighted with the honours of ambition live private and obscure? He, attended with crowds of clients, thinks solitude the most dreadful punishment. He must still, thought I, be infested by tenacious allurements; drunkenness, pride, anger, rapacity, cruelty, ambition, and lust, must still domineer over him.

“In all this I had a peculiar eye to my own case; I was myself entangled in many errors of my former life, from which I did not think it possible to be cleared: whence I favoured my vices, and through despair of what was better I cleaved to my own evils as vernacular. But after the filth of my former sins was washed off by the laver of regeneration, and divine light infused itself from above into my heart, now purified and cleansed; after, through the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit from heaven, the new birth had made me a new creature indeed, immediately and in an amazing manner dubious things began to be cleared up, things once shut to be opened, dark things to shine forth; what before seemed difficult, now appeared feasible, and that was now evidently practicable which had been deemed impossible; I acknowledged that which was born after the flesh, and had lived enslaved by wickedness, was of the earth; but the new life, now animated by the Holy Ghost, began to be of God. You know yourself, and recollect as well as myself, what that death of crimes and that life of virtues took from us, and what it conferred upon us. You know yourself, nor do I proclaim it: to boast of one’s own praises is odious; though that cannot be called an expression of boasting, but of gratitude, whatever is not ascribed to the virtue of man, but is professed to proceed from the gift of God; so that a

deliverance from sin begins to be of faith, the preceding state of sin was the effect of human error. Of God it is, of God, I say, even all that we can do; thence we live, thence we have strength, thence conceiving and assuming vigour, though as yet placed below, we know before-hand the vestiges of our future felicity. Let only fear be the guardian of innocence, that the Lord, who kindly shone into our minds by the effusion of heavenly grace, may be detained as our guest by the soul delighting in him, in a regular course of upright conduct, lest pardon received should beget a careless presumption, and the old enemy break in afresh.

But if you keep the road of innocence and righteousness, if you walk with footsteps that do not slide, if hanging with all your heart and with all your might on God, you be only what you have begun to be, you will then find according to the proportion of faith, so will your attainments and enjoyments be. For no bound or measure can be assigned in the reception of divine grace, as is the case of earthly benefits. The Holy Spirit poured forth profusely, is confined by no limits, nor restrained by any barriers, he flows perpetually, he bestows in rich abundance. Let our heart only thirst and be open to receive him; as much of capacious faith as we bring, so much abounding grace do we draw from him. Hence an ability is given, in sober chastity, in uprightness of mind, in purity of words, for the healing of the sick, to be able to extinguish the force of poison, to cleanse the filth of distempered minds, to speak peace to the hostile, tranquillity to the violent, and gentleness to the fierce; to compel unclean and wandering spirits by menaces to quit their hold of men, to scourge and control the foe, and bring him to confess what he is by torments. Thus, of what we have already begun to be, the spirit received enjoys its licences; though, till we have changed our body and members, the prospect, as yet carnal, is obscured by the cloud of the world. What a power, what an energy is this! that the soul should not only be emancipated from slavery, and be made free and clean, but still stronger

and victorious, to be able to triumph over the powers of the enemy ?”

The testimony here given to the ejection of evil spirits, as a common thing even in the third century among the christians, deserves to be noticed, as a proof that miraculous influences had not ceased in the church. Minutius Felix speaks to the same purpose, and I think with more precision. “Being adjured by the living God, they tremble wretched and reluctant in the bodies of men, and either leap out immediately, or vanish by degrees, as the faith of the patient, or the grace of the person administering relief may be strong or weak.” Indeed the testimony of the fathers in these times is so general and concurrent, that the fact itself cannot be denied without universally impeaching their veracity. It is not my province to dwell on this ; the sanctifying graces of the Spirit are the most important, and they are described by Cyprian as by one who had seen and tasted them. A life and energy, far out of the reach of common rational processes and evidently divine, he doubtless felt in himself in his conversion, and he appeals to his friend Donatus if he had not felt the same.

We may safely infer that such things were then frequently known among christians, even though the effusion of the Holy Ghost was not so much known as in the two former centuries. Indeed what else can account for a change so sudden, so rapid, and yet so firm and solid, as obtained in Cyprian ? For nothing can be conceived more different in the last thirteen years of his life, than he must have been from his former self. Will modern fastidiousness call all this enthusiasm ?

The reader will see, in the account here given, the essential doctrines of justification and regeneration, by divine grace, not only believed but experienced by this zealous African. The difference between mere human and divine teaching is rendered more striking by such cases. With no great furniture of learning, it was his happiness to know little if any thing of the then reigning philosophy. We see a man of business and of the world rising at once a Phoenix in the church, no extra-

ordinary theologian, in point of accurate knowledge, yet an useful, practical divine, an accomplished pastor, flaming with the love of God and of souls, and with unremitted activity spending and being spent for Christ Jesus. This is the Lord's doing, and it should be remarked as his. We shall see his own conversion prepared him for real service, and while they disputed and reasoned in the east, in the west they loved.

He seems to express a remarkable influence of divine grace as having accompanied his baptism. It was reasonable to suppose that it was commonly the case at that time : the inward and spiritual grace really attended the outward and visible sign. It is to be lamented, that the perversion of after-ages availing itself of the ambiguous language of the fathers on this subject, which with them was natural enough, supposed a necessary connexion to take place where there had been a common one. In Cyprian's time to call baptism itself the new birth was not very dangerous. In our age it is poison itself ; for it has long been the fashion to suppose all baptized persons regenerate of course ; and thus have men learnt to furnish themselves with a convenient evasion of all that is written in scripture concerning the godly motions of the Holy Spirit.

Cyprian goes on, " and that the marks of divine goodness may appear the more perspicuously by a discovery of the truth, I will lay open to your view the real state of the world, removing the darkness of evils, and detecting the hidden darkness of this present course of things. Fancy yourself for a little time withdrawn to the top of a high mountain, thence inspect the appearance of things below you, and looking all around, yourself unfettered by worldly connexions, observe the fluctuating tempests of the world, you will pity mankind, and admonished of your own bliss, and made more thankful to God, you will with more joy congratulate your escape."

He then gives an affecting view of the immensity of evils which the state of mankind at that time exhibited, and graphically delineates the miseries of public and

private life, and then returns to the description of the blessing of true christianity.

“The only placid and sound tranquillity then, the only solid, firm, and perpetual security is, if any man delivered from the tempests of this restless scene, be stationed in the port of salvation, lift up his eyes from earth to heaven, and being admitted into the favour of the Lord, and approaching near to his God with his mind, justly boast that whatever sublime and great in human things among others, lies within the sphere of his conscience. He who is greater than the world, can desire nothing, can want nothing of the world. What a stable, what an unshaken protection is it, a castle truly divine and fraught with eternal good, to be loosed from the snares of an entangling world, to be purged from earthly dregs, to be wafted into the light of immortal day, and to see what the insidious rage of the enemy (who before infested us) plotted against us. We are the more compelled to love what we shall be, while it is allowed us both to know and to condemn what we were. Nor is there any need for this of price, of canvassing, or of manual labour, that the complete dignity or power of man may be acquired by elaborate efforts; but the gift of God is gratuitous and easy. As the sun shines freely, as the fountain bubbles, as the rain bedews, so the celestial Spirit infuses himself. After the soul, looking up to heaven, has known its Author, higher than the earth, and sublimer than all secular power, she begins to be what she believes herself to be. Do you, whom the heavenly warfare hath marked for divine service, only preserve untainted and sober your christian course by the virtues of religion. Let prayer or reading be your assiduous employment; one while speak with God, another while hear him speak to you; let him instruct you by his precepts, let him regulate you; whom he hath made rich, none shall make poor. There can be no penury to him whose heart has once been fattened with celestial marrow. Roofs arched with gold, and houses inlaid with marble, will be vile in your eyes, when you know that you yourself

are rather to be cultivated and adorned; that this house is more valuable which the Lord has chosen to be his temple, in which the Holy Ghost has begun to dwell. Let us adorn this house with the paintings of innocence, let us illuminate it with the light of righteousness. This will never fall into ruin through the decays of age; its ornaments shall never fade. Whatever is not genuine is precarious, and affords to the possessor no sure foundation. This remains in its culture perpetually vivid, in honour spotless, in splendor eternal; it can neither be abolished nor extinguished; only it will receive a richer improvement of its form at the resurrection of the body.

Let us spend this day in joy, nor let an hour of our entertainment be unconnected with divine grace. Let the sober banquet resound with psalms; and as your memory is good, your voice harmonious, perform this office according to custom. Your dear friends will be agreeably fed, if we hear spiritually, and religious harmony delight our ears."

In all this the intelligent reader sees a picture of a christian alive, possessed of some rich portion of that effusion of the Holy Ghost, which, from the apostle's days, still exhibited Christ Jesus, and fitted by experience to communicate to others the real gospel, and to be an happy instrument of guiding souls to that rest which remains for the people of God.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Beginnings of the Persecution of Decius, and Cyprian's Government till his Retirement.

HOW Cyprian conducted himself in his bishopric, who is sufficient to relate? says Pontius in the fulness of his admiration. Some particular account however might have been expected from one who had such large opportunity of information. One thing he notices of

his external appearance. His looks had the due mixture of gravity and cheerfulness, so that it was doubtful whether he was more worthy of love or of reverence. His dress also was correspondent to his looks; he had renounced the secular pomp to which his rank in life entitled him, yet he avoided affected penury. From a man of Cyprian's piety and good sense united, such a conduct might be expected.

While Cyprian was labouring to recover the spirit of godliness among the Africans, which long peace had corrupted, Philip was slain and succeeded by Decius. His enmity to the former emperor conspired with his Pagan prejudices to bring on the most dreadful persecution which the church had yet experienced. It was evident that nothing less than the destruction of the christian name was intended. The chronology is here remarkably embarrassed, nor is it an object of consequence to trouble either myself or the reader with any studious attempt to settle it. Suffice it to say that the eventful period before us of Cyprian's bishopric extends from the year 248 to 260, and that Decius' succession to the empire must have taken place toward the beginning of it. The persecution raged with astonishing fury, beyond the example of former persecutions both in the east and west. The latter is the scene before us at present. And in a treatise of Cyprian concerning the lapsed,* we have an affecting account of the declension from the spirit of christianity, which had taken place before his conversion, which moved God to chastise his church. "If the cause of our miseries, says he, be investigated, the cure of the wound is found. The Lord would have his family to be tried. And because the long peace had corrupted the discipline divinely revealed to us, the heavenly chastisement hath raised up our faith which had lain almost dormant; and when by our sins we had deserved to suffer still more, the merciful Lord so moderated all things, that the whole scene rather deserves the name of a trial than a

persecution. Each was bent on improving his patrimony; forgetting what believers had done under the apostles, and what they ought always to do, they brooded over the arts of amassing wealth. The pastors and the deacons each forgot their duty, works of mercy were neglected, and discipline was at the lowest ebb. Luxury and effeminacy prevailed. Meretricious arts in dress were cultivated. Fraud and deceit were practised among brethren. Christians could unite themselves in matrimony with unbelievers, could swear not only without reverence, but even without veracity; with haughty asperity they despised their ecclesiastical superiors; could rail against one another with outrageous acrimony, and conduct quarrels with settled malice; even many bishops, who ought to be guides and patterns to the rest, neglecting the peculiar duties of their stations, gave themselves up to secular pursuits; deserting their places of residence and their flocks, they travelled through distant provinces in quest of gain, gave no assistance to the needy brethren, were insatiable in their thirst of money, possessed estates by fraud, and multiplied usury. What have we not deserved to suffer for such a conduct? Even the divine Word hath foretold us what we might expect, "*if his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments, I will visit their offences with the rod, and their sin with scourges.*" These things had been denounced and foretold, but in vain; our sins had brought our affairs to that pass, that while we despised the Lord's directions we were obliged to undergo the correction of our evils and the trial of our faith by severe remedies."

That a deep declension from christian purity had taken place not only in the east, where false philosophy aided its progress as we have seen, but also in the west, where the common influence of prosperity on human depravity alone appears, is now completely evident, and it deserves to be remarked, that the first grand and general declension, since the first out-pouring of the Divine Spirit, should be fixed about the middle of this century. The wisdom and goodness of God is also to be

observed in first qualifying the bishop of Carthage by a strong, personal work on his own heart, and then in raising him to the See of Carthage to superintend the western part of his church in a time of trial like the present, which should operate as a wholesome medicine to revive the declining spirit of christianity, and which needed all that fortitude, zeal, and wisdom with which he was so eminently endowed.

In such a situation it is not to be expected that Cyprian's people would in general stand their ground ; avarice had taken such deep root among them that vast numbers lapsed into idolatry immediately. Even before men were accused as christians, many ran to the forum and sacrificed to the gods as they were ordered, and the crowds of them were so large* that the magistrates wished to defer a number of them till the next day, but were importuned by the wretched supplicants to allow them that night to prove themselves heathens.

At Rome the persecution raged with unremitting violence. There Fabian the bishop suffered, and for some time it became impracticable to elect a successor ; and yet it does not appear that the metropolis suffered more in proportion than some other places, since we find that the flame of persecution had driven some bishops from distant provinces, who fled for shelter to Rome.† Cyprian, however, having been regularly informed by the Roman clergy of the martyrdom of their bishop, congratulated them on his glorious exit, ‡ and exulted on occasion of his uprightness and integrity. He expresses the pleasure he conceived that his edifying example had so much penetrated their minds, and owns the energy which he felt to imitate the pattern.

Moyse and Maximus, two Roman presbyters, with other confessors, were also seized and imprisoned. Attempts were repeatedly made to persuade them to relinquish the faith, but in vain. Cyprian found means to write to them also a letter full of benevolence, and breathing the strongest pathos.§ He tells them that his heart

* Cypri. delapsis.

† Ep. 31. Pam. Edit.

‡ Ep. 4.

§ Ep. 16.

was with them continually, that he prayed for them in his public ministry, and in private. He comforts them under the pressures of hunger and thirst which they endured, and congratulates them for living now not for this life, but for the next, and particularly because their example would be a means of confirming many who were in a wavering state. But Carthage soon became an unsafe scene to Cyprian himself. By repeated suffrages of the people at the theatre he was demanded to be taken and given to the lions; and it behoved him immediately either to retire into a place of safety, or to expect the crown of martyrdom.

Cyprian's spirit in interpreting scripture was more simple, and more accommodated to receive its plain and obvious sense, than that of men who had learnt to refine and subtilize. He knew the liberty which his Divine Master had given to his people of fleeing, when they were persecuted in one city, to another, and he embraced it. Nay, he seems scarce to have thought it lawful to do otherwise. Even the last state of his martyrdom evinces this. His manner of enduring it when it providentially was brought on him sufficiently clears him of all suspicion of pusillanimity. To unite such seemingly opposite things as discretion and fortitude, each in a very high degree, is a sure characteristic of greatness in a christian, it is grace in its highest exercise. Pontius thinks it was not without a particular divine direction that he was moved to act in this manner for the benefit of the church. Behold him now safe, under God, from the arm of persecution, through the love of his people in some place of retreat, for the space of two years, and let us next see how this time was employed.

CHAPTER IX.

The History of Cyprian and the Western Church during his Retirement of two Years.

CYPRIAN was never more active than in his retreat. Nothing of moment occurred in ecclesiastical affairs either in Africa or in Italy with which he was not acquainted; and his counsels under God were of the greatest influence in both countries. I shall endeavour to abbreviate the account from his own letters which were written in this period.

The presbyters of Carthage sent Clementius, a sub-deacon, to Rome, from whom the Roman clergy learnt the retreat of the bishop. They, in return, to express to the Africans their perfect agreement in opinion concerning the fact, because he was an eminent character, and a life extremely valuable to the church. They represent the conflict as very important, which God had now permitted, to try his servants, willing to manifest both to angels, and to men, that the conqueror shall be crowned, and the conquered be self-condemned. They express the deep sense which they had both of their own situation and that of the clergy of Carthage, whose duty it was to take care not to incur the censure passed on faithless shepherds in the prophet.* but rather to imitate their Lord the good shepherd who laid down his own life for the sheep,† and who so earnestly and repeatedly charges Simon Peter, as a proof of his love to his Master, to feed his sheep.‡ “We would not wish, dear brethren,” say they, “to find you mere mercenaries, but good shepherds, since you know it must be highly sinful in you not to exhort the brethren to stand immoveable in the faith, lest the brethren be totally subverted by idolatry. Nor do we only in words thus exhort you, but, as you may learn from many who come from

* Ezek. xxxiv. 3, 4.

† John x.

‡ John xxi.

us to you, we have done, and still do, with the help of God, all these things with all solicitude and at the hazard of our lives, having before our eyes the fear of God and perpetual punishment, rather than the fear of men and a temporary calamity ; not deserting the brethren, and exhorting them to stand in the faith, and to be ready to follow their Lord when called ; we have also done our utmost to recover those who had gone up to sacrifice to save their lives. Our church stands firm in the faith in general, though some overcome by terror, either because they were persons in high life, or were moved by the fear of man, have lapsed ; yet these, though separated from us, we do not give up as lost altogether, but we exhort them to repent, if they may find mercy with him who is able to save ; lest, by relinquishing them, we make them still more incurable.

Thus, brethren, we would wish you also to do, as much as in you lies, exhorting the lapsed, should they be seized a second time, to confess their Saviour. And we suggest to you to receive again into communion any of these, if they heartily desire it, and give proofs of sound repentance. And certainly officers should be appointed to minister to the widows, the sick, those in prison, and those who are in a state of banishment. A special care should be exercised over the catechumens, to preserve them from apostacy ; and those whose duty it is to inter the dead ought to consider the interment of the martyrs as matter of indispensable obligation.

Certain we are, that those servants who shall be found to have been thus faithful in that which is least will have authority over ten cities.* May God, who does all things for those who hope in him, grant that we may all be found thus diligently employed ! The brethren in bonds, the clergy, and the whole church salute you, all of us with earnest solicitude watching for all who call on the name of the Lord. And we beseech you, in return, to be mindful of us also in your prayers."

Several observations offer themselves on this occasion, 1. It appears both at Rome and Carthage that

the reduced mode of episcopacy was the form of ecclesiastical government which gradually prevailed in the christian world. It is not to be supposed that the whole body of christians either at Rome, or at Carthage, was no more than what might be contained in one assembly. The inference is obvious.

2. The Roman church appears, in the beginning of Decius' persecution at least, to have been in a much more thriving state than that of Carthage, and their clergy to have been models worthy of imitation in all ages.

3. The administration of discipline wisely tempered by tenderness and strictness among them, is admirable.

4. The work of the Divine Spirit infusing the largest charity, even to the laying down of their lives for the brethren, is apparent among them.

See now the spirit of a primitive pastor, full of charity and meekness, zeal and prudence, in the following letter of Cyprian to his clergy.

"Being hitherto preserved by the favour of God, I salute you, dearest brethren, rejoicing to hear of your safety. As present circumstances permit not my presence among you, I beg you, by your faith and by the ties of religion, to discharge your office, in conjunction with mine also, that nothing be wanting either on the head of discipline or of diligence. I beg that nothing may be wanting to supply the necessities of those who are imprisoned because of their glorious confession of God, or who labour under the pressures of indigence and poverty, since the whole ecclesiastical fund is in the hands of the clergy for this very purpose, that a number may have it in their power to relieve the wants of individuals.

I beg further, that you would use every prudential and cautious method to procure the peace of the church; and if the brethren, through charity, wish to confer with and visit those pious confessors, whom the divine goodness hath thus far shone upon by such good beginnings, that they would however do this cautiously, not in crowds, nor in a multitude; lest any odium should

hence arise, and the liberty of admission be denied altogether ; and while, through greediness, we aim at too much, we lose all. Consult therefore and provide, that this may be done safely and with discretion ; so that the presbyters one by one, accompanied by the deacons in turn, may successively minister to them, because the change of persons visiting them is less liable to breed suspicion. For in all things we ought to be meek and humble, as becomes the servants of God, to redeem the time, to have a regard for peace, and provide for the people. Most dearly beloved and longed-for, I wish you all prosperity, and to remember us. Salute all the brethren ; Victor the deacon, and those that are with us, salute you.”*

The defection of such numbers must have penetrated deeply the fervent and charitable spirit of Cyprian. Not only very many of the laity, but part of the clergy had also been seduced. “ I could have wished,”† says he, “ dearest brethren, to have had it in my power to salute your whole body sound and intire ; but as the melancholy tempest has, in addition to the fall of so many of the people, also affected part of the clergy, sad accumulation of our sorrow ! we pray the Lord, that by Divine mercy we may be enabled to salute you, at least whom we have known to stand firm in faith and virtue, safe for the time to come. And though the cause loudly called on me to hasten my return to you ; first, on account of my own desire and regret for the loss of your company, a desire which burns strongly with me ; in the next place, that we might in full council settle the various objects in the church which require attention ; yet, on the whole, to remain still concealed seemed more adviseable on account of other advantages which pertain to the general safety, an account of which our dear brother Tertullus will give you, who, agreeably to that care which he employs in divine works with so much zeal, was also the adviser of this counsel, that I should act with caution and moderation, and not rashly

* Epis. 5.

† Epis. 6.

commit myself to the public view in a place where I had so often been sought and called for.

Relying therefore on your charity and conscientiousness, of which I have had good experience, I exhort and charge you by these letters, that you, whose situation is less dangerous and invidious, would supply my lack of service. Let the poor be attended to as much as possible, those I mean who have stood the test of persecution; suffer them not to want necessities, lest indigence do that against them which persecution could not. I know the charity of the brethren has provided for very many of them; yet if any want meat or clothing, as I wrote you before, while they were yet in prison,* let their necessities be supplied."

In what follows he shews the deep knowledge which he had of the depravity of the heart, apt to fall, through vain-glory and self-conceit, on the consciousness of having well performed our part in any respect, and I cannot forbear transcribing the practical rules of humility which follow.

"Only let them know, that they must be instructed and taught by you, as the doctrines of scripture require subordination in the people to their pastors; they should cultivate an humble, modest, and peaceable demeanour, that those who have been glorious in confession, may be equally so in conduct. The harder trial yet remains: the Lord saith, "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved."† Let them imitate the Lord whose humility never shone more than at the eve of his passion, when he washed his disciples' feet. The apostle Paul too, after repeated sufferings, still continued mild and humble. His assumption to the third heaven begat in him no arrogance, neither, says he, "did we eat any man's bread for nought, but laboured and travailed night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you."‡

Each of these things do you instill into the brethren; and because he who humbles himself shall be exalted,

* It appears from hence that a number of them had been released.

† Matthew x. 22.

‡ 2 Thess. iii. 8.

now is the time more particularly that they should fear the snares of the enemy of souls, who loves to attack the strongest, and to revenge the disgrace which he has already sustained from them. The Lord grant that in due season I may be enabled to see them again, and exhort them to useful purpose. For I am grieved to hear that some run about in insolent and idle fooleries, or give themselves up to strife, and even pollute those members which had confessed Christ, by fornication, and are not willing to be subject to the deacons or presbyters, but seem to act as if they intended, by the bad conduct of a few confessors, to bring disgrace on the whole body. He is a true confessor indeed, of whom the church may not blush, but glory.

To the point concerning which certain presbyters wrote to me, I can answer nothing alone; for from the beginning of my bishopric I determined to do nothing without your consent and the consent of the people. But when I shall return to you by the favour of God, we will treat in common of all things."

* In the next letter to the confessors he dwells on the same subject, the ill conduct of some of them. The use of good discipline in the church of God, the benefits of orderly subjection in the members, the danger of pride and self exaltation, and the deceitfulness of the human heart, appear hence abundantly.

After having congratulated them on the steadiness of their confession, he reminds them of the necessity of perseverance, since faith itself and the new birth saves us to life eternal, not merely as once received, but preserved. He reminds them, that the Lord regards him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembles at his words, and he rejoices to find that the greatest part of the confessors thus adorned the gospel. But he had heard that some of them were puffed up; to these he exhibits the mild, charitable, and humble spirit of the Lamb of God: "And dare, says he, any one who lives by him now, and who lives

in him, to lift himself up with pride? He that is least among you, the same shall be great. How execrable ought that to appear among you which we have heard with the deepest sorrow of heart? He then repeats what he had before mentioned of the lasciviousness of some.

“Contentions and strifes ought to have no place among you, since the Lord has left us his peace. I beseech you abstain from reproaches and abuse; for he who speaks what is peaceable, and good, and just, according to the precepts of Christ, confesses Christ daily. We renounced the world when we were baptized; but now we truly renounce the world, when being tried and proved by God, leaving all our own things we have followed the Lord, and stand and live in his faith and fear. Let us strengthen one another with mutual exhortations, and strive to grow in the Lord, that when in his mercy he shall give us peace, which he has promised, we may return to the church as new men, and that both our brethren and the Gentiles may receive us improved in holy conduct, that they who before admired the fortitude of christians, may admire also the excellency of their morals.”

The mind of Cyprian, full of the fear of God, and reflecting, from a comparison of christian precepts with the practice of professors, how deeply his people had provoked the Lord before the persecution, was vehemently incited to stir them up to repentance. See how he preaches to the people from his recess.*

“Though I am sensible, dearest brethren, for the fear which we all owe to God, that you are instant in prayers, yet I also admonish you that you would breathe out your souls to God, not only in words, but also in fasting, tears, and every method of supplication. In truth, we must understand and confess that the apostacy which, in so large a degree, has wasted our flock and still wastes it, is the proper consequence of our sins.”

* Epis. 8.

He then goes on to speak of their practical corruptions, as he does in his treatise concerning the lapsed. "And what plagues, what stripes do we not deserve, since even confessors, who ought to be patterns to the rest, are quite disorderly ! Hence, while the tumid and indecent pride of their confession puffs up some, torments have come, and torments unremitted, tedious, and most distressing, even to death itself."

Let us pray with our whole heart for mercy, if in receiving we find a delay, because we have deeply offended ; let us knock, because to him that knocketh it shall be opened, if only prayers, groans, and tears beat the door." He then records some visions, which, as they rather suit the dispensation of that age in which miracles were by no means wanting, I pass over.

"Our Master himself prayed for us, being himself no sinner, but bearing our sins. And if he labour and watch for us and our sins, how much more should we be urgent in prayer, first intreating our Lord himself, and then through him we may obtain favour with God the Father. The Father himself corrects and takes care of us, standing still in the faith in the midst of pressures, and sticking close to his Christ, as it is written, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ ? Shall tribulation, or distress, persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword ?" None of these can separate believers, nothing can pluck off those who stick to his body and blood. Persecution is the examination and trial of our heart. God would have us to be sifted and tried, nor was ever his help wanting in trials to those who believe. Let our eyes be lifted up to heaven, lest earth with its enticements deceive us. If the Lord see us humble and quiet, lovingly united, and corrected by the present tribulation, he will deliver us. Correction has come first, pardon will follow ; let us only pray on in steady faith, and like men placed between the ruins of the fallen, and the remains of those who fear, between a numerous company of the sick, and a small band of those who stand."

The persecution at Carthage hence appears very dreadful, but mostly so on account of the number of apostates; and christian faith, patience, and magnanimity in Cyprian, and a small remnant, were in full exercise.

The persecutors endeavoured to lessen the number of christians by banishing those who confessed Christ from Carthage; but this not answering their purpose, they proceeded to cruel torments. Cyprian hearing that some had expired under their sufferings, and others were still in prison yet alive, wrote to those last a letter of encouragement and consolation. Their limbs had been sorely mangled and torn, and appeared like one continued wound; yet they remained firm in the faith and love of Jesus. One of them (Mappalicus) amidst his torments, said to the proconsul, "To-morrow you shall see a contest." What he uttered in faith the Lord fulfilled, and he lost his life in the conflict next day.*

So keenly was the mind of Cyprian set on heavenly things, and so completely lifted up above the world, that he ardently exulted and triumphed in those scenes of horror. He describes the martyrs and confessors as wiping away the tears of the church, while she was bewailing the ruins of her sons. Even Christ himself he describes as looking down with complacency, fighting and conquering in his servants, giving to believers as much strength as the receiver believes he can receive, "he was present in the contest," says he, "erected, corroborated, animated his warriors. And he who once conquered death for us, always conquers in us." Toward the close he consoles, with suitable arguments, those who had not yet been crowned with martyrdom, but were prepared for it in spirit.

The joy of Cyprian on account of the faithfulness of the martyrs must have been considerably damped by the disorderly conduct which began to take place in his absence. The lapsed christians offered themselves to some of the presbyters of Carthage, to be received into

* Epis. 9.

the church, who admitted them, without any just evidence of their repentance, to the Lord's supper. Those who had suffered for Christ, and were on the point of martyrdom, and to whom it was usual on these occasions to make application, wrote to Cyprian, and desired that the consideration of these cases might be deferred till the persecution was stopped, and the bishop was restored to his church. He dissembles not his displeasure on this occasion; confesses he had long borne with these disorders for the sake of peace, till he thought it his duty to bear with them no longer; that it was quite unprecedented to transact these things without the consent of the bishop,* that even in lesser offences a regular time of penitence was exacted of the members, a certain course of discipline took place, they made open confession of their sins, and were readmitted to communion by the imposition of hands of the bishop and his clergy. He directs that the irregular practice may be stopped, till on his return every thing might be settled with propriety.

Some of the martyrs themselves, it appears,† acted very inconsiderately in this business, and gave commendatory papers to lapsed persons, conceived in general terms. Cyprian wishes them to express the names of the persons, and to give no such recommendations to any but those of whose sincere repentance they had some good proof, and yet refer the cognizance of affairs to the bishop.

Every thing has two handles. Mosheim, in his Ecclesiastical History, represents Cyprian as stretching the episcopal power beyond its due bounds. I see no evidence of his exceeding the powers of his predecessors. And a pious care for the good of souls, not any ambition for the extension of his own authority, seems to influence his mind in these things; but of this the learned reader must judge for himself, who will take the pains to examine his Epistles with attention. But

* A farther confirmation of the antiquity of the reduced episcopal mode of government in the church of Christ.

† Epis. 11.

the English reader may judge for himself by the following letter, and ask his own heart, whether it is the language of a tender father of the church, or of an imperious lord.

Cyprian to the Brethren of the Laity, greeting.

I know from myself that you groan over and grieve for the ruins of our people, dearest brethren, as I groan over and grieve with you for each of them, and feel what the blessed apostle said, "Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is offended and I burn not?" and again he says, "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." I sympathize and condole with our brethren, who, lapsing through the violence of persecution, draw with them part of our bowels, and by their wounds have brought acute pain to us. Divine grace is able indeed to heal them; yet I think we should not be in a hurry, nor do any thing incautiously and precipitately, lest, while we rashly admit them into communion, the divine displeasure be more grievously incurred. The blessed martyrs have written to us, begging that their desires may be examined, when, the Lord vouchsafing us peace, we return to the church; then every thing shall be examined in your presence and with concurrence of your judgments. Yet I hear that some presbyters, neither mindful of the gospel, nor considering what the martyrs have written to us, and in contempt of the episcopal authority, have already begun to communicate with the lapsed, and to administer the Lord's supper to them, in defiance of that legitimate order by which alone they should be admitted. For if in lesser faults this be observed, much more in evils like these which radically affect christian profession itself. Our presbyters and deacons ought to admonish them of this, that they may cherish the sheep intrusted to them, and instruct them in the way of salvation by divine rules. I have too good opinion of the peaceable and humble disposition of our people to believe that they would have ventured to take such a step, had they

not been seduced by the adulatory arts of some of the clergy.

Do you then take care of each of them, and by your judgment and moderation, according to divine precepts, moderate the spirits of the lapsed ; let none pluck off fruit as yet unripe with improvident precipitation ; let none commit a vessel again to the deep, shattered already and leaky, till it be carefully refitted ; let none put on his tattered garment, till he see it thoroughly repaired. I beseech them to attend to our counsel, and expect our return, that when we shall come to you by the mercy of God, we may examine the letters and the desires of the martyrs in the presence of the confessors according to the will of the Lord, and with the concurrence of other bishops convened together."

It is observable from hence, that persons, whose religion had more of form than sincerity, and whose consciences were not altogether seared, acted in the same manner then as such do now, they were more hasty to gain the good will of men than of their Maker. They were ambitious of the favour of persons of undoubted piety, as the martyrs then were, and we shall see soon still stronger proof, that even men of undoubted godliness are sometimes too apt to repay the professions of respect made to them, by concessions to those of ambiguous characters, of a dangerous nature. The Lord's supper was then, as it is now, made by some an engine of self-rigteous formality. And it is in cases of this nature that wholesome church-discipline is very precious. The danger of false healing justly appeared great to Cyprian, nor can any thing be conceived more proper than the delay which he directed. Yet as the time was protracted to a more distant period than he expected, and he was afraid that the sickly season of the hot weather might carry off some of the lapsed, he directs, in a subsequent letter,* that any of the lapsed penitents whose lives might be in danger should, by such church officers as were authorized, be

* Epis. 13. i.

re-admitted into the church. And he intreats his clergy to cherish the rest of the fallen christians with care and tenderness, and observes that the grace of the Lord would not forsake the humble.

His exhortations to his clergy were not without effect. They fell in with his views, and solicited the people to patience, modesty, and real repentance, and asked of him how to act in critical cases, for which he* refers them to the former letters, and repeats his idea of the proper time of settling the concerns of the rest, urging at the same time the indecency of some in expecting a re-admission into the church before the return of those, who were in exile, and stripped of all their goods for the sake of the gospel. "But if they are in such excessive hurry, it is in their own power to obtain even more than they desire. The battle is not yet over; the conflict is daily carrying on. If they cordially repent, and the fire of divine faith burns in their breasts, he who cannot brook a delay, may, if he please, be crowned with martyrdom."

The African prelate was ever studious of preserving an intimate connexion with the Roman church, where still the persecution raged, and permitted them not to elect a successor to Fabian. The next epistle is employed in giving them an account of his proceedings.

But the bold neglect of discipline in Carthage proved a source of vexation to his mind, in addition to his other trials, and called forth all the patience, tenderness, and fortitude of which he was possessed. Lucian, a confessor of Christ, sincere and fervent in faith, but injudicious, and too little acquainted with christian precepts, undertook, in the name of all the confessors to give peace to all the lapsed who had applied to them,† and wrote a short letter to Cyprian, desiring him to inform the rest of the bishops of what they had done, and that they would acquiesce in the views of the martyrs. It cannot be denied, that on the one hand a superstitious veneration for the character of a martyr and

* Epis. 14. † Epis. 17.

a confessor had grown among these Africans, and that those who had suffered for Christ* in persecution were apt to be elated with spiritual pride on the account, and to assume a right which by no means belonged to them; so dangerous a thing is it to be unacquainted with Satan's devices, and so prone in all ages are even professors of true religion to walk in the steps of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.†

Cyprian sent the copy of this letter to his clergy at Carthage. "*To this man will I look,*" saith the Lord, "*even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word.*" This character becomes us all, particularly those who have fallen, that they may appear before the Lord humble and penitent indeed." He informs them that the bishops his brethren had agreed with him in opinion to defer the consideration of the cases of the lapsed to a council to be held by them in general, after it should please God to restore peace to his church, and he urges them to support his views, informing them at the same time of the correspondence between Caldonius, an African bishop, and himself, and and sending them the copies of the letters.

It is not known in what place Caldonius lived, but he, like Cyprian, was very cautious in restoring the lapsed to communion. Some however of his church having apostatized by sacrifice, were called to a second trial, and recovered their ground, in consequence were driven into banishment and stripped of their property. Caldonius expressed his opinion that such should be re-admitted. Felix, a presbyter, and his wife Victoria, and Lucius, thus lost their possessions, which were forfeited to the imperial treasury. A woman also named Bona, who was dragged by her Pagan husband to sacrifice, was, while they held her hands, compelled to a seeming compliance, but she fully cleared her integrity by saying, "I did it not, ye have done it." She also was banished. Caldonius having stated these facts, and given his own opinion, asks the advice of Cyprian, who

* Epis. 18.

† See Numbers 16.

acquiesces in his judgment, wishing also that the rest of the lapsed, who gave him so much affliction, were disposed to retrieve their christian character by these methods, rather than increase their faults by their pride and insolence.*

One Celerinus, a confessor, living in some part of Africa, most probably in banishment, was much pained on account of the apostacy of his two sisters Numeria and Candida. He wept night and day in sackcloth and ashes on their account, and hearing of Lucian still in prison and reserved for martyrdom at Carthage, he wrote to him to intreat him or any of his suffering brethren, particularly whosoever should first be called to martyrdom, to restore them to the church. He begs the same favour for Etcusa also, who, though she had not sacrificed, had given money to be excused from the act.† And he assures Lucian of the sincerity of their repentance, evidenced by their kindness and assiduity in attending on their suffering brethren. He evidently attributes too much to the character of a martyr, when he says he was a friend and a witness for Christ, and therefore could indulge all their desires. This letter and Lucian's answer demonstrate the mixture of good and evil, true grace tarnished with pitiable ignorance, and superstition. Both Celerinus and Lucian were doubtless good men, but we are more disposed to be candid toward the evils of our own age than of those of preceding times.

The conduct of Lucian affords a memorable instance of the pitiable weakness of human nature even in a regenerate spirit. His answer to Celerinus‡ demonstrates at once the most consummate fortitude, and as far as appears grounded on the true faith and love of Christ, yet mixed with a deplorable and subtile spirit of pride perhaps, yet certainly unknown to himself. He speaks of himself and his companions as shut up in two cells, oppressed with hunger and thirst, and intolerable heat arising from the pressure of the tortures. He mentions

* Epis 19, 20.

† Epis. 21.

‡ Epis. 22.

a number of them as already killed in prison, and informs him that in a few days he will hear of his expiring. "For five days, says he, we have received very little bread and water by measure." Such were the sufferings of this persecution. Lucian speaks of all this in a cool, unaffected manner, like one whose mind was lifted up above the world and its utmost malice, and patiently expected a blessed immortality. As to the question of Celerinus and his sisters, he informs him that Paul the martyr, who had lately suffered, while yet in the body, called him and said, "Lucian, I say to thee before Christ, that if any after my decease beg peace of you, you would impart it to him in my name." Lucian extends this generosity to the greatest height, and refers him to the general letter he had already written in behalf of the lapsed. Yet he owns they ought to explain their cause before the bishop, and make a confession. It is plain however that he attributes a sort of superior dignity to Paul, himself, and the other martyrs in this matter, and the vain-glory of martyrdom was no doubt much augmented by the excessive regard which now began to be paid to sufferers. Yet he speaks of his tears and sorrows on account of the lapsed women, and whilst we acknowledge that the corruptions of superstition, with respect to the immoderate honours paid to saints and martyrs, and which were afterwards improved by Satan into idolatry itself, had already entered into the church, it ought to be candidly confessed, that Lucian appears a person of real piety, though of small judgment. I have given the most material things in his letter, I hope without any mistake of consequence, which whether from his very distressed circumstances, the corruptions of the text, or his own want of ability, is confused and perplexed beyond measure.

It is evident that a spirit extremely dangerous to the cause of piety, humility, and wholesome discipline, was spreading fast in the African church. Celerinus himself, who had been a confessor, owns that the cause of his sister had been heard by the clergy of her church,

then, it seems, destitute of a bishop, who had deferred the settlement of it till the appointment of the chief pastor; but the precipitation of men would brook no delay.

The eyes of all prudent and more discerning persons in the church were fixed on the bishop of Carthage in this emergency. The danger of the loss of the gospel itself, by substituting a dependance on saints instead of Christ Jesus, struck his mind. His connexion with the Roman clergy, and the superior regard to discipline which there prevailed, was of some service on the occasion, and in his correspondence with them* he compares the immoderate conduct of Lucian with the modesty of the martyr Mappalicus, who had abstained from such practises, only had written in behalf of his mother and sister, and of Saturninus, who was tortured and imprisoned, and yet sent out no letters at all. Lucian, he complains, gave out every where papers written with his own hand in the name of Paul, while alive, and continued to do so after his death, declaring that he had ordered him to do so, though he should have known that he ought to obey the Lord rather than his fellow-servant.

A young person, named Aurelius, who had suffered torments, was seized with the same vanity, but was unable to write, and Lucian wrote many papers in his name.

Cyprian complains of the odium thus incurred by the bishops. In some cities he takes notice how the multitude had forced the bishops to re-admit the lapsed, and he blames their want of faith and christian constancy. In his own diocese he had occasion for all his fortitude. Some who were formerly turbulent, were now much more so, and insisted on their speedy re-admission. He takes notice of baptism being performed in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and the remission of past sins then received, and complains of the name of Paul, in affect, being inserted in the room of the Trinity. And St. Paul's well-known holy

* Epis. 23.

execration denounced in the beginning of the Epistle to the Galatians he applies on this occasion. He owns his obligations to Rome for the letters of their clergy, which were well calculated to withstand these abuses.

He* wrote a congratulatory letter to Moyses and Maximus, to whom he had formerly written, commending their faith and zeal, united with modesty and the strictest attention to discipline; and he thanks them for the epistolary advice which they had given to the African confessors on that subject. In their answer† they appear transported with holy joy, and elevated with the heavenly prospects before them. They quote the New Testament scriptures relating‡ to these things, and express such strength of faith, hope, and charity, as demonstrates the real power of divine grace to have been possessed by them in a very eminent manner. Their love of the divine Word and of just discipline appear no less great than their ardent zeal for martyrdom. They observe how deeply and how widely spread the evil of defection had been, and conclude with very just observations on the right method of treating the lapsed in perfect agreement with Cyprian. Greatness and order, warmth and judgment, are equally evident in this Epistle, and shew, from the just proportion of parts, that the work of the Holy Spirit was very sound in these holy men.

Cyprian now wrote to the lapsed themselves, rebuking the precipitation of some, and exposing the injustice of their claims, since they acted as if they took to themselves the whole title of the church, and commending the modesty of others who refused to take advantage of the indiscreet recommendations of the martyrs, and wrote to him in the language of penitents whence it appears that the folly of the lapsed was by no means universal.§

One Gaius Diddensis, a presbyter of his, and his deacon, undertook, against the sense of the rest of the

* Epis. 25.

† Epis. 26.

‡ Mat. v. 10. 11. Luke vi. 23. Mat. x. 18. Rom. viii. 35.

§ Epis. 27.

clergy, to communicate with the lapsed. Repeated admonitions availed not to a reformation. As the bishop was sensible that the common people, for whose salvation he was solicitous, were deceived by these things, he commends his clergy for refusing communion with them. He again* intimates his intention of judging all things in full council, upon his return, and intreats them to co-operate with his views in the maintenance of discipline in the mean-time. In writing again to the Roman clergy he declares his determination of acting as God had directed his ministers in the gospel, if the contumacious were not reformed by his and their admonitions.†

The Roman clergy in another letter condole with Cyprian, "because," say they, "you have no rest in so great necessities of persecution, and because the immoderate petulance of the lapsed has proceeded to the height of arrogance. But though these things have grievously afflicted our spirits, yet your firmness and evangelical strictness of discipline hath moderated the load of our grief; while you both restrain the improbity of some, and by exhorting them to repentance shew them the wholesome way of salvation. We are astonished that they should proceed to such lengths, in a time so mournful, so unseasonable as the present, that they should not ask for peace but claim it as a right, nay say that they have it already in the heavens." They go on to confute their claims with arguments not impertinent, but which need not here be repeated, and in the spirit of christian charity they proceed: "do you, brother, desist not according to your charity to moderate the spirits of the lapsed and to offer the medicine of truth to the erroneous, though the inclination of the sick are wont to reject the industry of physicians. This wound of the lapsed is yet fresh; the stroke rises into a tumour; and therefore we are assured, that in process of time, that impetuosity of theirs abating, they will be thankful that they were prevented for the pres-

* Epis. 28.

† Epis. 29.

ent, and deferred to a wholesome cure, provided there be none to arm them with weapons against themselves, and by perverse instructions to demand for them the deadly poison of an over-hasty restoration; for we cannot think that they would all* have dared to have claimed their admission so petulantly without the encouragement of some persons of influence in the church. We know the faith of the Carthaginian church, its institution, its humility, whence we have been surprised that we observed some harsh reflections made against you in an epistle, when we have formerly had repeated proofs of your mutual charity."

They proceed to give the most wholesome advice to the lapsed, and in truth the whole conduct of the Roman clergy at this time reflects the highest honour on their wisdom and charity, and affords the most pleasing proofs of the good state of that church at that time. The same can by no means be said of Cyprian's. They were, as we have seen, a declining people before his time; the scourge of persecution cut off vast numbers by apostacy; in those days of discipline the lapsed shewed the same dispositions of selfishness and pride, by their eagerness for re-admission, which in our times are evinced by wanting to hear nothing but comfort preached to them, by finding fault with ministers who dare not speak false peace, and by unsoundly healing themselves. We are perfectly lax in point of discipline; few seem to value its menaces on the disorderly; with the first christians it was an awful subject. The same depravity of nature seems now to work on the corrupt in another way, and to exercise still the patience and fortitude of godly ministers, who, by still persevering in their duty, and not giving way to the unreasonable humours of their people in things of importance, will find in the end a wholesome issue with respect to many at least of their froward people.

* They must have understood that by much the major part at least of the lapsed were guilty of this evil

There was one Privatus, an African, who had left Africa, and coming to Rome, solicited to be received as a christian. Cyprian had mentioned him to the Roman clergy, and pointed out his real and dangerous character. In the close of this admirable* letter they inform him that before they had received his letters they had detected the fraud of the man. At the same time they lay a golden maxim, "that we all ought to watch for the body of the whole church, diffused through various provinces." It was this unity and uniformity of the christian church which hitherto had preserved it under God from the infection of heresies. None of them were yet able to mix themselves with the body of Christ, and instead of being broken into small handfulls of distinct sets of persons, all glorying in having something peculiarly excellent, and apt to despise their neighbours, as yet the church knew no other name than christian; diversity of place alone prevented their assembling all together; but they were one people. In Italy and Africa the union at this time appears very salubrious, and the vigour and spirit of Cyprian was enabled to apply the solid graces of the Roman church for the reformation of his own disordered flock.

The Roman clergy, in a† second letter, take notice of St. Paul's eulogium of their church in the beginning of his epistle, that their faith was spoken of through the whole world, and express their desire of still treading in their steps. They mention the cases of Libellatici, which were two-fold; 1st, those who delivered in books to heathen magistrates, abjuring the gospel, and at the same time begging off the act of sacrificing by money; 2dly, those who got their friends to do these things for them. Both these and those who had actually sacrificed were censured by the Roman clergy as lapsed persons. They mention likewise the letters sent by the Roman confessors into Africa to the same purport, and express their pleasure on account of the consistency of their conduct in matters of discipline with their suffer-

* Epis. 30.

† Epis. 31.

ings for the faith. They declare their agreement, in opinion with him, to defer the settlement of these matters to an united plan, after peace should be restored. "Behold," say they, "almost the whole world laid waste, and the remains of the fallen to lie every where: with one and the same counsel, with unanimous prayers and tears let us, who seem hitherto to have escaped the ruins of time, as well at those who seem to have fallen into them, intreat the Divine Majesty, and beg peace in the name of the whole church; let us cherish, guard, arm one another with mutual prayers; let us intreat for the lapsed, that they may be raised; let us pray for those who stand, that they may not be tempted to ruin; let us pray that those who have fallen, sensible of the greatness of the crime, may have the wisdom not to wish for a crude and momentary medicine, nor disturb the yet fluctuating state of the church, lest they appear to have inflamed an internal persecution. Let them knock at the doors, but not break them. Let them go to the threshold of the church, but not leap over it. Let them watch at the gates of the heavenly camp, but with that modesty which becomes those who remember they have been deserters. Let them arm themselves indeed with the weapons of humility, and resume that shield of faith which they dropped through the fear of death; but so that they may be armed against the devil, not against the church who grieves at their fall."

The want of a bishop at Rome was an additional reason for delay; they speak of some neighbouring bishops who had the same views, and of some who had fled to them from distant provinces through the flame of persecution.

There was one Aurelius, who twice underwent the rage of persecution for the sake of Christ. Banishment was his first punishment, and torture the second. Cyprian speaks of him as though very young, yet excelling in the graces of christianity. Him he ordained a reader in the church of Carthage, and excuses, from the circumstances of the case, his not having previously consulted his presbyters and deacons, and beseeches

them to pray that both himself and Aurelius may be restored to them. I cannot but observe from hence how exact and orderly the ideas of ordination were in those times. It is not to the advantage of godliness among us, that any person can now without ceremony assume to himself the highest offices in the ministry.*

Celerinus was also ordained a reader by the same† authority. However weak in judgment he may appear from the transactions between him and Lucian already stated, the man suffered with great zeal for the sake of Christ. The very beginning of the persecution found him a ready combatant. For nineteen days he had remained in prison fettered and starved; but he persevered and escaped at length without martyrdom: but his grandfather and two uncles had suffered for Christ, and their anniversaries were celebrated by the church.

It seems, that Cyprian thought proper to reward with honourable establishments in the church those who had suffered with the greatest faithfulness in the persecution, which was now drawing to a close. Numidicus was advanced to the office of presbyter. He had attended‡ a great number of martyrs murdered partly with stones and partly by fire. His wife, sticking close by his side, was burnt to death with the rest: himself, half burnt, buried with stones, and left for dead, was found afterwards by his daughter, and drawn out and recovered. This seems to be the effect of a tumultuary persecution. One may conceive that the ferocity of many would not, in those times, wait for legal orders to oppress christians. What an indefinite number of sufferers must be added to the list of martyrs on this account!

Amidst all these cares the charity and diligence of Cyprian toward his flock was unremitted. The reader who loves the annals of genuine and active godliness will not be wearied in seeing still fresh proofs of it in extracts of two letters to his clergy.§

* Epis. 33.

† Epis. 34.

‡ Epis. 35.

§ Epis. 36, 37.

“ Dear brethren, I salute you, still safe by the grace of God, wishing to come soon to you, that my desire, yours, and that of all the brethren may be gratified. Whenever, on the settlement of your affairs, you shall write to me that I ought to come, or if the Lord should condescend to shew it me before, then I will come to you; for where can I have more happiness and joy than there, where God appointed me both to believe and to grow up. I beseech you take diligent care of the widows, the sick, and all the poor; and supply also strangers, if any be indigent, with what is needful for them, out of my proper portion which I left with Rogatian the presbyter. And lest that portion by this time should be all spent, I have sent to the same, by Naricus the Acolyth,* another portion, that you may the more readily and largely supply the distressed.

Though I know you have been frequently admonished by my letters to shew all care for those who have gloriously confessed the Lord and are in prison, yet I must repeatedly intreat the same thing. I wish circumstances permitted my presence among you; with the greatest pleasure would I discharge the offices of love toward you; but do you represent me. A decent care for the interment, not only of those who died in torture, but also of such as died under the pressures of confinement, is necessary. For whoever hath submitted himself to torture and death under the eye of God, hath already suffered all that God would have him suffer. Mark also the days in which they depart this life, that we may celebrate their commemoration among the memorials of the martyrs. Though our most faithful and devoted friend Tertullus, agreeably to his usual attention and care, (who also attends to their obsequies) hath written, and still writes and intimates to me the days in which the blessed martyrs are transmitted to immortality. And their memorials are here celebrated, and I hope shortly, under divine Providence, to be able to celebrate them with you. Let not your care

* An inferior officer of the church, signifying an attendant.

and diligence be wanting for the poor, who have stood firm in the faith, and fought with us in the christian warfare. Our love and attention are the more requisite, because neither poverty nor persecution have driven them from the love of Christ."

It is obvious to see into what idolatry these commemorations of martyrs afterwards degenerated. But I observe no signs of it in the days of Cyprian. In addition to other evils the providence of God now thought fit to exercise the mind of Cyprian with a calamity, one of the worst to a lover of peace and charity, the rise of a schism.

* There was one Felicissimus in the church of Carthage, who had long been a secret enemy of the bishop, and a person of very exceptionable character. He had now, by the artifices and blandishments used by seditious persons in all ages, drawn some of the flock to himself, and held communion with them on a certain mountain. Some persons being sent from Cyprian to pay the debts of the poor brethren, and to furnish them with a little money to begin business again, and also to make a report of their ages, conditions, and qualities, that he might select some of them for ecclesiastical offices, Felicissimus opposed them and thwarted both these designs. Some of the poor who came first to be relieved were threatened by him with imperious severity, because they refused to communicate with him on the mountain. This man growing more insolent, and taking advantage of Cyprian's absence, whose return he speedily expected, as the persecution had nearly ceased at Carthage, set up in form an opposition to the bishop, and threatened those who would not communicate with him, and found means to unite a considerable party to himself. To his other crimes the man had added that of adultery, and now saw no method of preventing an infamous excommunication, but that of setting up as a leader himself. One Augendus was his second, and did his utmost to promote his

views. Cyprian by letter expresses his vehement sorrow on account of these evils, promises to take full cognizance of them on his return, and in the mean time he writes to his clergy to suspend from communion Felicissimus and his abettors. And his clergy wrote him in answer, that they had suspended the chiefs of the faction accordingly.*

In the mean time there were not wanting upright and zealous ministers who instructed the people at Carthage. Among these were distinguished Britius the presbyter, also Rogatian and Numidicus, confessors, and some deacons of real godliness. These warned the people of the evils of schism, endeavoured to preserve peace and unity, and to recover the lapsed by wholesome methods. In addition to their labours Cyprian wrote now to the people†. "For," says he, "the malice and perfidy of some presbyters hath effected, that I should not be able to come to you before Easter.‡ But now whence the faction of Felicissimus has been derived, on what foundation it stands, is evident. These encouraged certain confessors, that they should not harmonize with their bishop, nor observe ecclesiastical discipline faithfully and modestly. And as if it were too little for them to have corrupted the minds of confessors, and to arm them against their pastor, and stain the glory of their confession, they turned themselves to poison the spirits of the lapsed, to keep them from the great duty of constant prayer, and to invite them to an unsound and dangerous peace. But I beseech you, brethren, watch against the snares of the devil, solicitous for your own salvation; this is a second persecution and temptation. The five seditious presbyters may be justly compared to the five Pagan rulers who lately published some plausible arguments, in conjunction with the magistrates, to subvert souls. The same method is tried by the five presbyters, united with Felicissimus, to ruin your souls, that you should not ask of God; that he who denied Christ should cease to

* Epis. 39. † Epis. 40.

‡ In what way they hindered his arriving sooner will appear afterwards.

supplicate the same Christ whom he hath denied ; that repentance should be removed, and every thing should be conducted in a novel manner against the rules of the gospel.

My banishment of two years it seems was not sufficient, and my mournful separation, from your presence, my constant grief and perpetual lamentation, and my tears flowing day and night, because the pastor whom you chose, with so much love and zeal could not salute nor embrace you. To my distressed spirit a still greater evil is added, that in so great a solicitude I cannot come over to you. The threats and snares of the perfidious oblige me to caution, lest on my arrival the tumult should increase ; and whereas the bishop ought to provide in all things for peace and tranquillity, he himself should seem to have afforded matter for the sedition, and again to exasperate the persecution. Most dear brethren, I beseech you do not give rash credit to pernicious words, nor put darkness for light ; they speak, but not from the word of the Lord ; they promise to restore the lapsed, who are themselves separated from the church.

There is one God, one Christ, one church. Depart, I pray you, far from these men, and avoid their discourse as a plague and pestilence. They hinder your prayers and tears by affording you false consolations. Acquiesce, I beseech you, in our counsel, who pray daily for you, and desire you to be restored to the church by the grace of the Lord. Join your prayers and tears with ours. But if any, careless of repentance, shall betake himself to Felicissimus and his party, let him know that his after-return to the church will be impracticable."

But I cannot by a few extracts give a perfect idea of the glowing charity, which reigned in Cyprian's breast on this occasion. Whoever has attended to the imbecility of human nature, ever prone to consult ease and to humour self, and to admit flattery, will see the difficult trials of patience, which faithful pastors in all ages have endured from the insidious arts of those who would heal the wounds of people falsely. Uncharitable

and imperious are the usual epithets with which they are aspersed for their faithfulness. But wisdom is justified of her children.

But there was another character who was the primary agent in these disagreeable scenes, Novatus a presbyter of Carthage, a man extremely scandalous and immoral.* His domestic crimes had been so notorious as to render him not only no longer fit to be a minister, but even unworthy to be received into lay communion. The examination of his conduct was just going to take place, when the breaking out of Decius's persecution prevented it. He it was who supported and cherished the views of Felicissimus and the rest, and appears by his address and capacity to have been extremely able to cause much mischief in the church, without the power of benefiting it in the least, from his entire want of conscience and honesty. Felicissimus himself, though at first the ostensible leader of the congregation on the mountain, gave way to Fortunatus, one of the five presbyters, who was constituted bishop in opposition to Cyprian. Most of the five had been already branded with infamy for immoralities. Yet so deep is the corruption of human nature, even where the light of the gospel shines, that even such will find advocates to espouse them against pastors of eminent sanctity, who irritate the corruptions of men by refusing to speak peace where there is no peace. It is no little proof of the strength of these evils, that even a persecution the most dreadful yet recorded in the annals of the church, did not unite christian professors in love. One hence sees the necessity for so severe a scourge to the church, and the advantages thence accruing to the real faithful, either by happily removing them to rest, out of a world of sin and vanity, or by promoting their sanctification, if their pilgrimage be prolonged.

Novatus, either unwilling to face the bishop of Carthage, or desirous to extend the mischiefs of schism, passed the sea and came to Rome. There he separated

* Epis. 49.

from the church a priest named Novatian, a friend of the confessor Moyses, whose sufferings at Rome were of a tedious nature. Moyses renounced his acquaintance on this, and died soon after in prison, where he had been near a year. He entered into full peace at length, having left the evidence of modesty and peaceableness in addition to his other more splendid virtues, as testimonies of his love to the Lord Jesus.

Novatus found the ideas of his new partner in religion placed in an extreme opposite to his own. Novatian had been a stoic before he was a christian, and he still retained the rigour of the sect to such a degree, that he held it wrong to receive those into the church who once had lapsed, though they gave the sincerest marks of repentance. Full of these unwarranted severities, he exclaimed against the unreasonable lenity of the Roman clergy in receiving penitents. Many of the clergy of Rome, who were still in prison for the faith, were seduced by his apparent zeal for church-discipline, among others Maximus and others to whom Cyprian had formerly written. These joined Novatian. His African tutor, with astonishing inconsistency, after having stirred up a general indignation in Africa against the bishop for severity to the lapsed, now supported a party who complained of too much lenity at Rome, and defended two extremes, it is hard to say which is the worse, with equal pertinacity within the compass of two years.

The Roman clergy thought it high time to stem the torrent. They had for sixteen months* with singular piety and fortitude governed the church during one of its most stormy seasons. Schism was now added to persecution; to be chosen bishop of Rome was plainly for a man to expose himself to martyrdom; for Decius threatened bishops with great haughtiness and asperity. Sixteen bishops happening to be then at Rome, ordained Cornelius as the successor of Fabian. He was very unwilling to accept the office; but the election of

* Fleury, b. 6.

a bishop to withstand the growing schism appeared necessary, and the people who were present approved of his ordination.

Novatian procured himself to be ordained bishop, in opposition, in a very regular manner,* and vented calumnies against Cornelius, whose life appears to have been worthy of the gospel.

Thus was formed the first body of christians, who, in modern language, ought to be called *Dissenters*, that is, men who separate from the general church, not on grounds of doctrine, but of discipline. The Novatianists held no opinions contrary to the faith of the gospel. It is certain, from some writings of Novatian extant,† that their leader was sound in the doctrine of the Trinity. But the confessors, whom his pretensions to superior‡ purity had seduced, returned afterwards to the communion of Cornelius, and wept over their own credulity. In a letter of Cornelius to Fabius, bishop of Antioch, we have occasionally the mention of a few circumstances which may give an idea of the church of Rome at that time.§ There were under the bishop forty-six priests, seven deacons, seven sub-deacons, forty-two acolyths, fifty-two exorcists, and readers with porters, widows, and impotent persons, above 1050 souls.

The number of the laity was, says he, innumerable. I don't know so authentic a memorial of the numbers of the christians in those times. In his letter he charges Novatian, perhaps without sufficient warrant, with having denied himself to be a priest during the heat of the persecution, and with obliging his separatists, when he administered to them the Lord's supper, to swear to adhere to him. He was daily more and more forsaken, and the party at Rome lost ground. In Africa, whither Novatus returned, the party held up its head, and ordained Nicostratus the deacon, the only person of

* See in Eusebius, b. 6, Cornelius's letter concerning Novatian, whom Eusebius confounds with Novatus by mistake.

† See Waterland's Importance of the Trinity.

‡ Epis. 48 and 49.

§ About the middle of the third century.

note, who was seduced at Rome by Novatian, and who refused to return to communion with Cornelius. Conscious of scandalous crimes,* he fled from Rome and became bishop of the Novatians in Africa.

It would not have been worth while to have detailed these events thus distinctly, but to mark the symptoms of declension in the church, the unity of which was now broken for the first time ; for it ought not to be thought that all the Novatians were men void of the faith and love of Jesus. The artifices of Satan also, in pushing forward opposite extremes, are worthy of notice. He tried both the lax and the severe method in point of discipline. The former he finds more suitable to the state of christianity among us. But it could gain no solid footing in the third century. The Novatian schism stood at last on the ground of excessive severity, a certain proof of the strictness of discipline then fashionable among christians, and of course of great purity of life and doctrine having been prevalent among them ; but to refuse the re-admission of penitents was a dangerous instance of pharisaical pride, though in justice to Novatian it ought to be mentioned that he advised the exhorting of the lapsed to repentance, and then leaving them to the judgment of God. But extreme austerity and superstition were now growing evils, and cherished by false philosophy. On the same plan Novatian also condemned second marriages.

At length Cyprian ventured out of his retreat and returned to Carthage. In what manner he conducted himself shall be the subject of the next chapter.

* The Novatians called themselves Cathari, pure people.

CHAPTER X.

*Cyprian's Settlement of his Church after his Return,
and the History of the Western Church till the Per-
secution under Gallus.*

THE prudence of Cyprian had been so remarkable during the whole of the persecution of Decius, that we may fairly conclude he had ceased to apprehend any personal danger when he appeared again in public at Carthage. In fact, it was not the cessation of malice, but the distraction of public affairs, which put an end to the persecution. Decius, on account of the incursion of the Goths, was obliged to leave Rome, and God gave a breathing time to his servants, while men of the world were wholly taken up with resisting or mourning under their calamities. After Easter a council was held at Carthage, and the eyes of christians were turned toward it, in expectation of some settlement of the very confused state of the church under the auspices of Cyprian and the other bishops of Africa. There at first, for want of exact information of circumstances, some delay was made before Cornelius was owned as legitimate bishop of Rome. But when the truth of things was laid open, the regularity of his appointment and the violation of order in the schismatical ordination of Novatian, by some persons who were in a state of intoxication,* there was no room to hesitate. Novatian was rejected in the African synod, and Felicissimus, with his five presbyters, was condemned. And now the case of the lapsed, which had given so much disquietude, and which Cyprian had so often promised to settle in full council, was finally determined, and with men who feared God it was no hard thing to adjust a due medium. A proper temperature was used between the precipitation of the lapsed and the stoical severity

* See Cornelius' letter in Euseb.

of Novatian. Hence penitents were restored, and the case of dubious characters was deferred, and yet every method of christian charity was used to facilitate their restoration.

Fortunatus preserved still a schismatical assembly. But both this bishop and his flock shrunk soon into insignificance. The christian authority of Cyprian was restored. The Novatian party alone remained a long time after, in Africa and elsewhere, numerous enough to continue a distinct body of professing christians. The little light which christian annals afford of these dissenters (and it is very little) shall be given in its place. I feel not the least inclination to partiality concerning them, for I am conscious that God is not confined to any particular modes of church-government. The laws of historical truth have obliged me indeed to observe that their secession could not be justified; but that does not render it impossible that the Spirit of God might be with some of this people during their continuance as a distinct body of christians.

Thus did it please God to make use of the vigour and perseverance of Cyprian in recovering the church of Carthage from a state of most deplorable declension. First she had lost her purity and piety to a very alarming degree, then was torn with persecution, and sifted by the storm so much that the greatest part of her professors apostatized; afterwards convulsed by schisms because of men's unwillingness to submit to the rules of God's own word, in wholesome discipline and sincere repentance. On Cyprian's return however, and the new train of discipline established by the council, Carthage, and most probably Africa, assumed a new face; unity was restored in a great measure; and though we want the accounts of particular instances, there is all reason to believe that the church of God was much recovered in these parts.

Decius lost his life in battle in the year 251, after having reigned thirty months. A prince not deficient in abilities and moral virtues, but distinguished, during this whole period, by the most cruel persecution of the

church of God : he was bent on its ruin, but perished himself ; his successor was Gallus, who for a little time allowed peace to the church.

It would now be proper to look into the east, and see the effects of the persecution there ; only a few circumstances which had attended it in the west must detain us a little longer.

Cyprian, zealous for the unity of the church, informed Cornelius,* that certain persons came to Carthage from Novatian, who insisted on being heard as to some charges which they had to produce against Cornelius. But as sufficient and ample testimony had already been given in favour of Cornelius, and a prudent delay had been made use of till the sense of the church of Rome had been authentically exhibited, they refused to hear the Novatians any more. These, he observes, began to strive to make a party in Africa, going into private houses and different towns for that purpose. The council of Carthage informed them that they ought to cease their obstinacy, and not to relinquish their mother the church, and to own that a bishop being once constituted and approved by the testimony and judgment of his colleagues and the people, another could not be lawfully set up in his room ; therefore, if they would consult for themselves peaceably and faithfully, if they owned themselves to be the assertors of the gospel of Christ, they ought to return to the church.

Though the ideas of this Epistle may sound very strange to the ears of many professors of godliness in our days, I see not, I own, on what principles they can be controverted. There is a medium between the despotism of idolatrous Rome and the extreme licentiousness of many in our day. Is peace to be preserved in the church ? Is unity precious ? Certainly ; then the sense of the majority, where a church has been evangelically settled, and pastors sound in faith and manners are appointed, ought to prevail. It cannot be right for single persons, on no better ground than their own fan-

* Epis. 41.

cy and humour, to dissent. This is not keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; but this was the first origin of the Novatian schism.

Persons, who have used themselves to the lawless mode of acting in religion which now so unhappily prevails, who feel no pity for the church of Christ, nor care how much her members be torn one from another, and make no more difficulty of changing their pastors than their workmen, will not enter into the beauty of Cyprian's charitable concern for the unity of the church. It is evident union at Rome was as much on his heart as union at Carthage, because he considered Christ's body as one. He explains* to Cornelius why the acknowledgment of him as bishop was delayed, and how he was honourably received on full information. He speaks of the Roman schism with horror, he represents the christian schismatics, as refusing the bosom and embrace of their mother, and as setting up an adulterous head out of the church. I will not vindicate expressions which go to the length of a total condemnation of the persons of all schismatics; schism is not so deadly an evil as heresy, nor must we judge of the hearts of others. But Cyprian's zeal requires in all reason that equal candour be shewn to himself. The evil, which had just begun to shew itself in Rome and Carthage, was then new in the christian world. Before his time no instance had happened of any separations made from the church, but for the support of damnable heresies; and it must be confessed, if really good men in all ages had possessed the same conscientious dread of the sin, it had fared much better with vital christianity; and those separations which must of necessity be made, when not tolerable inconveniences, but false worship and false doctrine are prevalent, would be treated with more respect in the world.

Encouraged with the success of his pacific labours at home, Cyprian endeavoured to heal the breaches of Rome. He was sensible that the examples of the con-

* Epis. 42.

fessors, whom Novatian's appearance of superior piety in discipline had seduced, had been attended with a great defection. He wrote respectfully to his former correspondents, assuring them that the deepest sadness had possessed his breast on their account ; he reminds them of the honour of their faithful sufferings, and intreats their return to the church, and points out the inconsistency of their glorious confession of Christ with their present irregularity. But so exactly attentive was Cyprian to order, that he first sent the letter to Cornelius, and ordered it to be read to him, and submitted to his discussion before he would suffer it to be sent to the confessors.* With the same cautious charity he explains again to Cornelius some things which had given him umbrage with respect to the delay of the acknowledgment of his ordination.† The chief reason why I think these things enter into my plan is, because the conduct of the African prelate is calculated to instruct christian ministers in all ages to enlarge their views as far as the whole church of Christ, and then only to think they grow in true zeal and true charity when they fear the evils of division, and labour to preserve peace and unity. The progress of christian grace is seen much in these things.

There is the greatest reason to believe that the authority of Cyprian had a great effect on the minds of Maximus and the other seduced confessors, whose undoubted piety gave the chief support to Novatian's party. But, as it often happens, the excessive eagerness of the schismatics defeated their own end at Rome. They were so fraudulent as to send out frequent letters in their name almost through all the churches to spread the schism. Maximus and the rest informed of this were surprised, owned themselves circumvented, and declared they knew not a syllable of the contents of these letters. Such the woful fruits of discord !

Their eyes now began to be opened, and they heartily desired a re-union with the church. The whole

* Ep. 43, 44.

† Ep. 45.

body of the Roman church (and there is every reason to believe it was at that time as pure a church as most) sympathized with these confessors both in their seduction and in their recovery. Tears of joy and thanksgiving to God were discovered in the assembly. "We confess," say Maximus and the rest with ingenuous frankness, "our mistake. We own Cornelius the bishop of the most holy *general church chosen by God Almighty and Christ our Lord; we suffered an imposture; we were circumvented by treachery and a captious plausibility of speech; for though we seem to have had some communication with a schismatic and a heretic,† yet our mind was sincerely with the church, for we knew that there is one God, one Christ, one Lord, whom we have confessed, one Holy Ghost, that one bishop ought to be in the general church." "Should we not," says Cornelius, "be moved with their profession, that what they had dared to confess before the world, they might approve, being restored to the church? Maximus the presbyter we restored to his office; the rest we received with the strong consent of the people."

Cyprian, with his usual animation,‡ congratulated Cornelius on the event, and describes the happy effect which the example of the confessors had on the minds of the people. In truth more tenderness of conscience, in point of schism, in many good men, who in modern times appear to me to have suffered themselves to be harassed by needless and frivolous scruples, might have prevented much evil in the church of Christ. But no one can now be deceived, says Cyprian, by the loquacity of a frantic schismatic, since it appears that good and glorious soldiers of Christ could not long be detained out of the church by perfidy and fallacy.

The Novatians being baffled at Rome. Novatus and Nicostratus went over to Africa. We have seen

* I choose to translate Cornelius' *Catholicæ* in Pam. 46, which gives an account of this transaction, *general* rather than *catholic*, to distinguish the church of Christ at large from particular separatists.

† They confound here two terms that ought to be kept distinct, Novatian was a schismatic, but not a heretic.

‡ Ep. 47.

what they did there, and Cornelius* wrote to warn Cyprian against their attempts. There is a disagreeable harshness of language in his account of his enemies in this letter; much the same spirit is breathed in the fragment of his Epistle in Eusebius. But though the character of Novatus appears entirely indefensible, and so does the whole ground of the schism, nor is there the least reason to believe that the spirit of God had left the general church to abide with the dissenters, yet the personal characters of some of their supporters might be excellent. I shall find a convenient place by and by to examine, as well as I can, that of Novatian himself.

Of Novatus the bishop of Carthage, one, who must have thoroughly known him, asserts expressly and circumstantially that he was guilty of horrible crimes, which, in truth, is neither pleasant in itself to particularize, nor does the plan of this history require that I should. The charity of Cyprian requires that this testimony should be admitted.† He was as remarkable for moderation as for zeal. He speaks with much sensibility of persons seduced by the arts of the foul impostor, and observes those only will perish who are wilful in their evils. The rest, says he, the mercy of God the Father will unite with us, and the grace of our Lord Christ and our patience. I wish this benevolent spirit had had so good an opportunity of knowing Novatian as Novatus. But a Roman, who does not appear ever to have come into Africa at all, could only be made known to him by report.

In answer to a friendly letter of the Roman confessors,‡ Cyprian, after congratulating them on their reunion with the church, and expressing his sincere sorrow for the former defection, delivers his sentiments on the duty of christians in this point. The flattering idea, which had seduced these good men, was a notion of appointing a church here on earth exactly pure and perfect. He may be heard with patience on this sub-

* Ep. 48.

† Ep. 49.

‡ Ep. 50, 51.

ject, who had sustained so much ill-will on account of his attention to discipline. Yet, while he thought it necessary that the lapsed should shew good marks of penitence, he was far from supposing that men should be able to decide positively in all cases who were true christians and who not, and to rectify all abuses, and cleanse the church of all tares. The middle state between impracticable efforts of severity and licentious neglect was Cyprian's judgment, and to separate from the visible church for the want of that exact purity in the members which the present state of things does not admit of, he held to be culpable. But let the reader hear him speak on a point which, though not of the first importance, deserves, on account of its influence on practice, to be deeply considered by all friends of vital godliness.

“Though there appear to be tares in the church, our faith and love ought not to be impeded so, that because we see tares in the church we must leave it. Our business is to labour, that we ourselves be found sound bread, that when the corn shall be gathered into the harvest, we may receive reward according to our labour. The apostle speaks of vessels not only of gold and silver but also of wood and of earth, and some to honour and some to dishonour.

“Be it our care that we be found vessels of gold or silver, but to break in pieces the vessels of earth belongs to the Lord alone, to whom is given a rod of iron. The servant cannot be greater than his master ; nor can any man claim to himself what the Father attributes to the Son alone, that he should think himself capable of thoroughly purging the floor or separating all the wheat from the tares by human judgment. It is proud obstinacy and sacrilegious presumption which a depraved madness assumes to itself ; and while some lay claim to a dominion beyond the demands of justice and equity, they perish from the church ; and while they insolently extol themselves, blinded by their own humour, they lose the light of truth. For this cause, holding a temperature, and contemplating the balance of the Lord,

and thirsting for the holiness and mercy of God the Father, after a long and careful deliberation, we have settled a just mediocrity. I refer you to my books on the subject, which I lately read here, and from common charity have sent over to you to read, in which neither a due censure is wanting to the lapsed, nor medicine to heal the penitent. I have expressed also my thoughts on the unity of the church to the best of my poor judgment.”*

There was one Antoninus, a bishop of some note, who was disposed to embrace the Novatian schism. To him Cyprian in a long letter explains with much force and clearness the whole of his ideas on the subject. A very short abridgment of it may be given, because of the charity and good sense which run through it.†

He clears himself from the charge of inconsistency, by shewing the views on which he formerly acted with strictness, now with lenity, under very different circumstances, informs him what had been determined both at Rome and Carthage concerning the lapsed, enlarges on the virtues of Cornelius, who had ventured his life in a time of severe trial under Decius, defends him against the unjust aspersions of the Novatians, and demonstrates that very different rules and methods should be used according to the different circumstances of offenders, and that Novatian's stoicism, by which all sins are equal, was vastly different from the genius of christianity. He supports his ideas of mercy by striking and apposite passages of scripture. For instance: “The whole need not a physician, but the sick.” What sort of a physician is he who says, “I cure only the sound?” “Nor ought we to think those whom we see wounded by the deadly persecution to be dead, but to lie half dead; else we should not afterwards behold in them the true characters of confessors and martyrs.”

He shews that the censures of the church are not to anticipate the judgment of the Lord. His quotations of scripture may well be spared in behalf of receiving

* He means his Treatises on the Lapsed and on the Unity of the Church.

† Epis. 52.

penitents again into the church. The uncharitableness of Novatian will hardly now find a defender.

He beautifully insists on the propriety and wholesomeness of mercy, gentleness, and charity, and exposes the unreasonableness of the dissent from this circumstance, that formerly in Africa some bishops denied a return into the church for adulterers, yet did not form a schism on that account. And yet an adulterer appears to him to deserve a greater degree of severity than a man who lapses through fear of torment. And he exposes the absurdity of the Novatians exhorting men to repent, while they rob them of all those comforts and hopes which should encourage repentance. It is observable that he alledges nothing particular against the personal character of Novatian; only his schism he looks on with all that excess of severity which I blamed above.

See from another circumstance the strictness of discipline which then prevailed in the purest churches. Several persons, who stood firm for a time in persecution and afterwards fell through extremity of torment, were three years kept in a state of exclusion from the church, and lived that time with every mark of true repentance. Cyprian being consulted* decided that they ought to be restored to the church.

The appearance of a new persecution from Gallus now threatening the church, Cyprian, with the African synod, wrote to Cornelius about hastening the time of receiving penitents, that they might be armed for the approaching storm.†

In the mean-time Felicissimus finding, after his condemnation, no security to his reputation in Africa, crossed the sea to Rome, raised a party against Cornelius, and by menaces threw him into great fear. Cyprian's spirit seems more disturbed on this occasion than in any of his Epistles I have yet observed. He supports the dignity of the episcopal character in a style of great magnificence, and it is from hence evident, that his continued ill treatment from men of this character

* Epis. 53.

† Epis. 54.

led him into some degree of impatience, and the language he uses of the authority of bishops would sound strange to our ears, though it by no means contains any definite ideas contrary to the scripture. The whole Epistle, in which he rouses the dejected spirit of Cornelius, shews much of the hero, not so much of the christian.* He confesses indeed that he speaks grieved, and compelled by a series of undeserved ill treatment. He takes notice that at the very time of writing this he was again demanded by the people to be exposed to the lions. He speaks of the ordination of Fortunatus, and also of one Maximus, by the schismatics, in a contemptuous manner. Yet it is evident that on the whole he triumphed in Carthage among his people. His great virtues and unquestionable sincerity secured him the affections of the church. They scarce had patience when he was for re-admitting a lapsed offender of note into the church, and when such were not amended by his lenity, they expressed their resentment. The eloquence, and even the genuine charity of this great man, appears through the Epistle; but it is deficient in the meekness and patience which shine in his other performances.



CHAPTER XI.

The Effects of the Persecution of Decius in the Eastern Church.

THE eastern and western churches were divided in those times by the Greek and Roman language from each other, though cemented by the common bond of the Roman government, and much more of the common salvation. It will often be found convenient to consider their history distinctly. The Gentile church of Jerusalem still maintained its respectability under Alexander its bishop, who has been spoken of above.

* Epis. 55, 56, 57, 58.

He was again called on to confess Christ before the tribunal of the president at Cæsarea, and in this second trial of his faith, having acquitted himself with his usual fidelity, he was cast into prison. His venerable locks procured him no pity nor respect, and he finally breathed out his soul under confinement.*

At Antioch Babylas after his confession dying in bonds, Fabius was chosen his successor. In this persecution the renowned Origen was called to suffer extremely. Bonds, torments, a dungeon, the pressure of an iron chair, the distension of his feet for many days, the threats of burning, and other evils were inflicted by his enemies, which he manfully endured. All these things ended at last in the preservation of his life, the judge solicitously taking care that his tortures should not kill him. "What words he uttered on these occasions, and how useful to those who need consolation, many of his Epistles," says Eusebius, "declare with no less truth than accuracy." Were they now extant, more light, I apprehend, might be thrown on the internal character of Origen, in respect to experimental godliness, than by all his works which remain. These shew the scholar, the philosopher, and the critic. Those would have shewn the christian. This great man died in his seventieth year, about the same time as the emperor Decius. An estimate of his character I shall find occasion to insert by and by.

Dionysius was at this time bishop of Alexandria, a person of great and deserved renown in the church; we are obliged to Eusebius for a few of his remains, some of which being historical, must be here inserted. In an Epistle to Germanus he speaks thus: "Sabinus the Roman governor sent an officer to seek me, during the persecution of Decius, and I remained four days at home, expecting his coming; he made the most accurate search in the roads, the rivers, and the fields where he suspected I might be hid. A confusion seems to have seized him, that he could not find my house;

* Euseb. b. 6, from c. 39 to the end.

for he had no idea that a man in my circumstances should stay at home. At length, after four days, God ordered me to remove,* and having opened me a way contrary to all expectation, I and my servants and many of the brethren went together. The event shewed the whole was the work of Divine Providence. About sun-set being seized together with my company by the soldiers, I was led to Taposiris. But my friend Timotheus, by the providence of God, was not present, nor was he seized. But, coming afterwards, he found my house forsaken, and ministers guarding it, and that we were taken captive. How wonderful was the dispensation! but it shall be related with truth. A countryman met Timotheus flying in confusion, and asked the cause of his hurry; he told him the truth: the peasant hearing it, went away to a nuptial feast; for in them the custom was to watch all night. He informed the guests of what he had heard. At once they all rose up, as by a signal, and ran quickly to us, and shouted; our soldiers, struck with a panic, fled, and the invaders found us as we were on naked beds. I first thought they must have been a company of robbers, and remaining on my bed in my linen garment, reached to them the rest of my apparel, which was just by. They ordered me to rise and go out quickly. At length, understanding their real designs, I cried out, intreating them earnestly to depart, and let us alone. But if they really meant any kindness to us, I begged them to prevent my persecutors and take off my head. They compelled me to rise by plain violence, and I threw myself on the ground. They, seizing my hands and feet, pulled me out by force; I was set on an ass, and conducted from the place." In so remarkable a manner was this useful life preserved to the church. We shall see it was not in vain.

In an Epistle to Fabius bishop of Antioch, he gives this account of the persecution at Alexandria, which had preceded the Decian persecution a whole year, and

* By a vision or some other divine manifestation, I suppose.

which must have happened therefore under Philip, the most open friend of christians. “ A certain augur and poet took pains to stir up the malice of the Gentiles against us, and to inflame them with zeal for the support of their superstitions. Stimulated by him, and giving free course to their licentiousness, they deemed the murder of christians to be the only piety and worship of demons. They first seized one Metras, an old man, and ordered him to blaspheme ; he refusing, they beat him with clubs, and pricked his face and eyes with sharp reeds ; and, dragging him to the suburbs, they there stoned him. Then hurrying one Quinta, a faithful woman, to the idol temple, they insisted on her worshipping. To which she shewing the strongest marks of abomination, fastening her by the feet, they dragged her over the rough pavement through all the city, having first dashed her against mill-stones, and whipping her, led her to the same place and despatched her. Then, with one accord, they all rushed on the houses of the godly ; and every one ran to his neighbours’, spoiled, and plundered them, purloining the most valuable of their goods, and throwing away those things which were vile and refuse, and burning them in the roads, and thus exhibiting the appearance of a captive and spoiled city. The brethren fled and withdrew themselves, and received with joy the spoiling of their goods, as those did to whom Paul beareth witness, and I do not know, that any except one falling into their hands, hitherto denied the Lord ; but having seized the admirable aged virgin Apollonia, beating her cheeks they dashed out all her teeth, and having kindled a fire before the city, they threatened to burn her alive, unless she would consent to blaspheme. But she begged a little intermission, quickly leaped into the fire, and was consumed. Having seized Serapion in his house, and tortured him, and broken all his limbs, they threw him headlong from an upper room. No road, public or private, was passable to us, by night or by day ; all of them crying out always and every where, that if they would not speak blasphemy, they should

be thrown into the flames, and these evils continued a long time. A sedition then succeeded, and a civil war, which averted their fury from us, and turned it against one another, and we breathed again a little during the mitigation of their rage. Immediately the change of government was announced. Persecuting Decius succeeded Philip our protector, and we were threatened with destruction; and the edict against us appeared, that foretold by our Lord so dreadful as to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.* All were astonished, many christians of quality shewed themselves immediately through fear; others, who held public offices, were constrained by their office to exhibit themselves; and others were drawn along by their Gentile relations; and being cited by name, they approached to the unholy altars; some pale and trembling, not as if they were going to sacrifice, but themselves to be the victims; so that they were derided by the multitude who stood around, and it was visible to all that they were very much frightened both at death and at the crime of sacrificing; but some ran more readily to the altar, affirming boldly, that they never had been christians. Of such our Lord affirmed most truly, that they should be saved with great difficulty.† Of the rest some followed one or other of these, others fled, others were seized, and of these some persisting to bonds and imprisonment, some of them having been confined many days, at last, before they were led to the tribunal, abjuring the faith, others of them enduring torments for a time, at length yielded. But the firm and stable pillars of the Lord, being strengthened by him, and having received vigour and courage analogous and correspondent to the strong faith which was in them, became admirable martyrs of his kingdom. The first of these was Julian, a gouty person who could neither stand nor walk; he was brought forth with two others who carried him; one of whom immediately denied Christ.

* It is evident that this application of our Lord's words is a mistake

† I suppose he means because they were rich.

The other, called Cronion the benevolent, and old Julian himself, having confessed the Lord, were led through the whole city, very large as ye know it is, sitting on camels, and scourged, and were at last burnt in a very hot fire in the view of surrounding multitudes. A soldier, one Besas, standing by them, and defending them against insults, incensed the mob against himself, and having played the man in the service of his God, had his head struck off. An African by birth, called Macar,* and truly meriting the appellation, having resisted much importunity, was burnt alive. After these Epimachus and Alexander, having long sustained imprisonment and undergone a thousand tortures, were burnt to death, and with these four women. Ammonarion, an holy virgin, being grievously tormented by the judge for having declared beforehand that she would not repeat the blasphemy which he ordered, and persisting faithful, was led away to execution. The rest, the venerable ancient Mercuria, and Dyonisia, mother of many children, but not loving them above the Lord, and another Ammonarion, the president being ashamed to torment them in vain, and to be baffled by women, were slain with the sword, without being exposed first to any torments; for their leader Ammonarion had undergone torture for them all. Heron, Ater, and Isidore, Egyptians, and with them a boy, Dioscorus, of fifteen, were brought before the tribunal: the boy resisted both the blandishments and tortures which were applied to him; the rest, after cruel torments, were burnt. The boy having answered in the wisest manner to all questions, and excited the admiration of the judge, was dismissed by him from motives of compassion, with an intimation of hope that he might afterwards repent. And now the excellent Dioscorus is with us, reserved to a greater and longer conflict. Nemesian was first accused as a partner of robbers; but having cleared himself before the Centurion of this accusation, and being informed against as a christian,

* Happy or blessed.

he came bound before the president, who most unjustly scourging him with twice the severity used against malefactors, burnt him among robbers. Thus was he honoured to resemble Christ in suffering.

And now some of the military guard, Ammon, Zeno, Ptolemy, and Ingenuus, and with them old Theophilus, stood before the tribunal, and a certain person being interrogated as a christian, and seeming inclined to deny, they made such lively signs of aversion as to strike the beholders; but before they could be seized, they ran to the tribunal, owning themselves christians, so that the governor and his assessors were astonished. These evidently had the ascendant over the judges, and went to execution with all the marks of exultation, God triumphing gloriously in them.

Many others through the towns and villages were torn to pieces by the Gentiles. One Iscyrion was an agent to a certain magistrate, who being ordered to sacrifice, refused; and, after repeated indignities, was killed by a great stake driven through his bowels. But why need I mention the multitude of those who, wandering in deserts and mountains, were destroyed by famine, and thirst, and cold, and diseases, and robbers, and wild beasts? of whom those who survived are witnesses of their election and victory. Suffice it to relate one fact: There was one Chæremon, a very aged person, bishop of the city of Nilus. He, flying into an Arabian mountain with his wife, returned not; nor could the brethren, after much searching, discover them alive or dead, and many about the same Arabian mountain were led captive by the Barbarian Saracens, some of which were afterwards redeemed for money with difficulty, others could never regain their liberty." Dionysius adds something of the charity of the martyrs towards the lapsed, contrasting it with the inexorable severity of Novatian.

Two things are evident from this narrative, 1st, that the persecution found the eastern christians as poorly provided against the storm as the western. The long peace and prosperity had corrupted both, and men in

the former part of this century had forgotten that a christian life was that of a stranger. The Decian persecution under God was at once a scourge and an antidote. 2d, Yet a competent number there still were of those who should prove the truth of christianity, and the power of divine grace accompanying it. The true church is not destroyed, but flourishes and triumphs amidst these evils inward and outward.

Eusebius relates a story from Dionysius' Letters to Fabius, which he says was full of wonder: "There was one Serapion, a faithful, aged person, who had lived blameless a long time, but in the time of temptation fell. He had frequently solicited to be restored to the church, but in vain, because he had sacrificed. Being in a disease, he continued speechless and senseless for three days successively; but recovering a little on the fourth, he called to his grandson, "And how long," says he, "do you detain me? I beseech you hasten and quickly dismiss me. Call one of the presbyters to me," and after this he was speechless. The boy ran for the presbyter; it was night; the presbyter was sick and could not come. But he had given directions to receive dying penitents, particularly if they had supplicated for it, that they might leave the world in good hope. He gave a little of the Eucharist to the boy, bidding him to dip it in water and put it into the old man's mouth; the child followed the directions, and before he entered Serapion again recruited, says, "You are come, son; do quickly what you are ordered, and dismiss me." The old man had no sooner received the morsel, than he gave up the ghost. Was he not evidently reserved, until he was absolved, and his sin being remitted, he might be acknowledged by Christ as a faithful servant on account of many good works." Thus far Dionysius.

I remark here, 1st, It is evident that the connexion between the sacrament and the grace conveyed by it, being thus expressed as if it were necessary and indissoluble, both in baptism and the Lord's supper, gave occasion to the increase of much superstition in the

church. I believe that both Dionysius and Serapion knew that the sign was nothing without the inward grace. Yet perhaps they are not to be cleared of superstition on account of the inordinate stress which they laid on external things. The reader must observe that this evil is growing up in this century.

2d, Along with this superstition the power of the leaders of the church would naturally swell beyond the due bounds. That it did so afterwards surprisingly is well known, but I think the evil has begun already both in the east and west.

3d, There was at that time, among persons of real piety, a general propensity to extend discipline too far; Serapion ought doubtless to have been received into the church before. The Lord seemed willing to give him a token of his loving kindness, by fulfilling his desires before he left the world of his being re-admitted into the church. But how much more decent and proper had it been for him to have been received while in health? Satan always pushes us to extremes. Church discipline was held then too high; with us it is reduced to little or nothing. Without communion with a visible church established in form, it was scarce thought possible for a man to be saved, however impracticable it might be: many would have then had no hope of Serapion's salvation, had the power of his disease prevented the reception of the Eucharist. This miserable superstition increased, till by the light of the reformation it was destroyed. In our age the Lord's supper itself is looked on as nothing by thousands who call themselves christians; and communion with a settled ministry and church is esteemed as a thing of no consequence by numbers who profess the doctrines of vital godliness.

Dionysius wrote several other treatises mentioned by Eusebius; among the rest he wrote to Cornelius, bishop of Rome, having received his letter against Novatian,* and informs him that he had been invited by Helenus

* Eusebius certainly calls him Novatus by mistake.

of Tarsus in Cilicia, and the rest of the bishops of his neighbourhood, by Firmilian of Cappadocia and Theoctistes of Palestine, to meet them in a synod at Antioch, where some attempts were made to strengthen the Novatian party. But all these churches united to condemn the schism ; and Dionysius wrote to the Roman confessors both before and after they had returned to the church. On the whole, the east and west united in condemning the new dissenters, whose head having professed that some brethren had compelled him to the separation, Dionysius wrote to Novatian himself to this effect : “ If you were led unwillingly ; as you say, you will prove it by returning willingly ; for a man ought to suffer any thing rather than to rend the church of God. Even martyrdom on this account would be no less glorious, even more so than any other. For in common martyrdom a man is a witness for one soul, here for the whole church. And now, if you would compel or persuade the brethren to unanimity, your good conduct would be more laudable than your defection was culpable. The latter will be forgotten, the former will be celebrated through the christian world. But if you find it impracticable to draw over others, save your own soul at least ; I wish you, studious of peace, to be strong in the Lord.” Such was the zeal of the christian leaders at that time for the preservation of unity. Had there been a defection from christian purity of doctrine in the general church, or were the heads of it vicious men, for the most part, in principle or practice, one might have suspected that the Lord had forsaken these, and that his spirit had rested chiefly with the new separatists. But that godliness in a considerable degree prevailed still in the church at large is evident. Cyprian, Dionysius, Cornelius, Firmilian, were holy men. Martyrs in abundance suffered for Christ’s sake from their flocks. A number of church-officers suffered in a very edifying manner. The lapsed were restored among them by the most christian methods of mildness and just discipline, and this with success in a variety of cases. Dionysius concurred with

Cyprian in his views on the subject ; and though the flame of christian piety was considerably lowered since the days of Ignatius, I see not a shadow of proof that there was any just reason for dissent or any superior degree of spirituality with the Novatians. Had there been any persons among them of half the piety of Cyprian for instance, I think it probable that we must have had some account of them.

It is my duty to trace the work of the Divine Spirit wherever I can find it. Traces of his Spirit with the Novatians in general in these times I cannot discern ; and yet it is improbable that they should be a people altogether forsaken of God. Wherever the real truth, as it is in Jesus, is professed, there some measure of his Spirit most probably is. Novatian himself is constantly reprehended both by Cyprian and Dionysius. Yet I observe they cast no imputations on his moral character. His schism alone is the object of their accusation. Cornelius indeed carries the matter still farther, as we have seen ; but I am not disposed to credit all he says. He was heated against him, and was in a state of personal competition with him. Let us, before we proceed to other instances of the Decian persecution, finish the whole of Novatian's affairs, by collecting what we can on the other side, in order to form a just estimate of his character. If after all the evidence be not satisfactory, let it be imputed to the scantiness of our materials.

Novatian from a stoic becoming a christian, seems to have contracted that severity which formed the basis of his sect. He was born a Phrygian, and came to Rome, where he received christianity. Having neglected some ecclesiastical forms after he had recovered from a sickness, he was objected to by the clergy and people when applying for the office of presbyter. The bishop, probably Fabian the predecessor of Cornelius, desired that the rules might be dispensed with in his case, and it was granted ; a testimony surely rather in favour of his abilities and conduct than otherwise, though

coming from the mouth of Cornelius his rival.* That he excelled in genius, learning, and eloquence, is certain. I hence infer, that he must have been a man of good character. The evils of his schism were great, but no blot seems affixed to his conduct, nor any just suspicion to lie on the purity of his intentions. One of the letters of the Roman clergy to Cyprian is still extant in his collection,† in which he at that time coincided with the African prelate, and it is worthy of a Roman presbyter and a zealous christian. Eusebius, in his Chronicon, ranks him among the confessors, and it is certain, that while he continued presbyter his fame was not only without a blot, but very fair in the church.

Perhaps it had been happy for him had he never consented to become a bishop. Cornelius being preferred before him in the election, was, probably enough, the grand cause of schism; and, from a temperate degree of severity, he became intolerably inexorable in his ideas of discipline. It is not for man to say how far temper, stoicism, prejudice, and principle might all unite in this business. We must now behold him bishop of the Novatians, and spreading the schism so far as he can through the christian world. The repeated condemnation of it in synods hindered not its growth, and as purity of conduct, with inflexible severity of manners, were their favourite object, it is not to be apprehended that Novatian could have supported himself in the opinion of his followers without some exemplariness of conduct. The christian faith he is allowed to have preserved in soundness. In truth, there is extant a treatise of his on the Trinity, one of the most regular and most accurate that is to be found among the ancients. It is astonishing that any should ascribe the ideas of the Trinity mainly to the Nicene fathers. We have repeatedly seen proofs of the doctrine from the apostles' days, being held distinctly in all its parts. This treatise of Novatian may be added to the list. I don't know how to abridge it better than to refer the reader to the

* See his letter in Eusebius.

† 31 Pam.

Athanasian creed. The Trinity in Unity, and the God-head and Manhood of Christ in one person, are not more plainly to be found in that creed than in this contemporary of Cyprian.

I wish a more experimental view, a more practical use of christian doctrines, were to be seen in it. But churchmen or dissenters, all christians seem to have relaxed in this respect. The savour and simplicity of the life of faith in Jesus was not now so well known; yet, particularly under the article of the Holy Ghost, he speaks very distinctly of him as the author of regeneration, the pledge of the promised inheritance, and, as it were, the hand-writing of eternal salvation, who makes us the temple of God and his house, who intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered, acting as our advocate and defender, dwelling in our bodies, and sanctifying them for immortality. He it is who fights against the flesh, hence the flesh fights against the spirit; and he goes on in the best manner to speak of his holy and blessed operations in the faithful.*

He wrote also a sensible little tract against the bondage of Jewish meats, and maintains christian liberty, according to the views of St. Paul, with just directions for the maintenance of temperance and decorum.

The letter to Cyprian before mentioned closes his works. He lived to the time of Valerian, under whom Cyprian suffered. In that persecution also fell Novatian by martyrdom, as appears from the authentic testimony of Socrates.† His rival Cornelius had suffered a little before them, dying in exile for the faith, and it is no unpleasant contemplation to conceive these three men meeting in a better world clothed with the garments of Jesus, and in him knowing their mutual relation which prejudice hindered in this life. I can by no means justify either the separation of Novatian, or the severity with which these two good bishops personally condemned him. We seem, however, to have found sufficient evidence of the christian character of the se-

* Nov. Trin. p. 114.

† L. iv. c. 28.

paratist. His death, added to the general tenor of his life, shews to whom he belonged.

The reader will pardon this digression, if it be a digression, to shew that the Spirit of God was not limited to one denomination, and to pave the way for that liberal and candid construction of characters, which it will behove us to cultivate in the future scenes of this history, while we trace the kingdom of God through a multiplicity of names and divisions of men.*

To proceed with the Decian persecution. It seems to have been the whole employment of magistrates to persecute. Swords, wild beasts, pits, red-hot chairs, wheels to stretch the bodies, and talons of iron to tear them; these were the instruments of this persecution. Malice and covetousness were deeply and strongly set on work during this whole short, but horrible reign in informing against christians. And the genius of men was never known to have had more of employment in aiding the savageness of the heart. Life was prolonged in torture, that impatience in suffering might affect at length what surprise and terror could not.

See two examples of Satanic artifice. A martyr having endured the rack and burning plates, the judge ordered him to be rubbed all over with honey, and then exposed him in the sun, which was very hot, lying on his back with his hands tied behind him, that he might be stung by the flies. Another person, young and in the flower of his age, was, by the order of the same judge, carried into a pleasant garden among flowers, near a pleasing rivulet surrounded with trees; here they laid him on a feather bed, bound him with silken cords, and left him alone. Then they brought thither a lewd woman very handsome, who began to embrace him and to court him with all imaginable impudence. The martyr bit off his tongue, not knowing how to resist the assaults of sensuality any longer, and spit it in her face. Shocking as these things were, christianity ap-

* Greg. Nyss. vita Thaum. p. 1000. See Fleury, b. 6—25.

peared what it is, true holiness; while its persecutors shewed that they were at enmity with all goodness.*

Alexander, bishop of Comana, suffered martyrdom by fire. At Smyrna Eudemon the bishop apostatized, and several unhappily followed his example. But the glory of this church, once so celebrated by the voice of infallibility,† was not totally lost. The example of Pionius, one of the presbyters, was salutary to all the churches. The acts of his martyrdom are still extant, and the substance, at least, of the account is confirmed by Eusebius, who refers us to his narrative not now extant. Nor, in general, is there any thing in the story improbable or unworthy of the christian spirit.‡ In expectation of being seized, he put a chain about his neck, and caused Sabina and Asclepiades to do the same, to shew their readiness to suffer. Polemon, keeper of the idol-temple, came to them with the magistrates: "Don't you know," says he, "that the emperor has ordered you to sacrifice?" "We are not ignorant of the commandments," says Pionius, "but they are those which command us to worship God." "Come to the market-place," says Polemon, "and see the truth of what I have said." "We obey the true God," said Sabina and Asclepiades.

When the martyrs were in the midst of the multitude in the market-place, "You had better," says Polemon, "submit to avoid the torture." Pionius began to speak: "Citizens of Smyrna, who please yourselves with the beauty of your walls and city, and value yourselves on account of your poet Homer, and ye Jews, if there be any among you, hear me speak a few words: We find that Smyrna has been esteemed the finest city in the world, and was reckoned the chief of those who contended for the honour of Homer's birth. I am informed that you deride those who come of their own accord to sacrifice, or who do not refuse when urged to it. But surely your teacher Homer should be attend-

* Jerom vita Paul.

† Rev. c. ii. ver. 8, 9, &c.

‡ Enseb. b. 4, c. 15. Fleury b. 6—39.

ed to, who says, that we ought not to rejoice at the death of any man.* And ye Jews ought to obey Moses, who tells you, "Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from him; thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again."† And Solomon says, "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth." For my part I had rather die and undergo any sufferings than contradict my principles.‡ Whence then proceed the laughter and scoffs of the Jews, pointed not only against those who have sacrificed, but against us? They insult us with a malicious pleasure to see our long peace interrupted. Though we were their enemies, still we are men. But what harm have we done them? What have we made them suffer? Whom have we spoken against? Whom have we persecuted? Whom have we compelled to worship idols? Do they think themselves less culpable than those who suffer death from persecution?" He then addressed the Jews on the grounds of their own scriptures, and solemnly placed before the Pagans the day of judgment.

The sermon bore some resemblance to Stephen's in like circumstances, tending to beget conviction of sin, and leading men to feel their need of the divine Saviour, according to the justest views and in the soundest taste of the gospel. He spake long, and was very attentively heard, and there is reason to hope it was not in vain. The people who surrounded him said with Polemon, "Believe us, Pionius, your probity and wisdom make us deem you worthy to live, and life is pleasant." Thus powerfully did conscience and humanity operate in their hearts. "I own," says the martyr, "life is pleasant, but I mean that which I aspire after. We will not, through a contemptuous spirit, forsake these gifts; but that which we prefer to them is infinitely better. But I thank you for your expression of kindness. I cannot, however, but suspect some stratagem in it."

* *Odyss.* xvii. v. 412.

† *Deut.* xxii. 4.

‡ Pionius adapts himself to his audience, and convicts them of guilt even by their own principles, a thing not hard to be done against all but true christians.

The people continued intreating him, and he still discoursed to them of an hereafter. The well known sincerity and unquestionable virtues of the man seem to have filled the Smyrneans with veneration, and his enemies began to fear an uproar in his favour. "It is impossible to persuade you then," said Polemon. "I would to God I could," says Pionius, "persuade you to be a christian."

Sabina had changed her name by the advice of Pionius, who was her brother, for fear of falling into the hands of her Pagan mistress, who, to compel her to renounce christianity, had formerly put her in irons, and banished her to the mountains, where the brethren secretly nourished her. She called herself Theodota since this happened. "What God dost thou adore?" says Polemon. "God Almighty," she answers, "who made all things, of which we are assured by his Word Jesus Christ." "And what dost thou adore?" speaking to Asclepiades. "Jesus Christ," says he. "What is there another God?" says Polemon. "No," says he, "this is the same whom we come here to confess." He who worships the Trinity in Unity will find no difficulty to reconcile these two confessions. Let him who does not so worship, attempt it. One person pitying Pionius, said, "Why do you that are so learned so resolutely seek death?"

Being put into prison, they found there a presbyter named Lemnus, and a woman named Macedonia, and another called Eutychiana, a montanist.

The prisoners were placed all together, and employed themselves in praising God, and shewed every mark of patience and cheerfulness. Many Pagans visited Pionius, and attempted to persuade him; his answers struck them with admiration. Some, who by compulsion had sacrificed, visited them and intreated them with tears. "I now suffer afresh," says Pionius; "methinks I am torn in pieces when I see the pearls of the church trod under foot by swine, and the stars of heaven cast to the earth by the tail of the dragon.* But our sins have been the cause."

* Rev. xii. 14.

The Jews, whose character of bigotry had not been lessened by all their miseries, and whose hatred to Christ continued from age to age with astonishing uniformity, invited some of the lapsed christians to their synagogue. The generous spirit of Pionius was moved to express itself vehemently against the Jews. Among other things he said, "They pretend that Jesus Christ died like other men by constraint. Was that man a common felon, whose disciples have cast out devils for so many years? Could that man be forced to die, for whose sake his disciples, and so many others, have voluntarily suffered the severest punishment?" Having spoken a long time to them, he desired them to depart out of the prison.

Though the miraculous dispensations attendant on christianity form no part of the plan of this history, I cannot but observe on this occasion, how strongly their continuance in the third century is here attested. Pionius affirms, that devils were ejected by christians in the name of Christ, in the face of apostates, who would have been glad of the shadow of an argument to justify their perfidy.

The captain of the horse coming to the prison, ordered Pionius to come to the idol-temple. "Your bishop Eudemon hath already sacrificed," says he. The martyr, knowing that nothing of this sort could be done legally till the arrival of the proconsul, refused. The captain put a cord about his neck, and dragged him along with Sabina and others. They cried, "We are christians," and fell to the ground, lest they should enter the idol-temple. Pionius, after much resistance, was forced in and laid on the ground before the altar; there stood the unhappy Eudemon, after having sacrificed.

Lepidus, a judge, asks, "What God do you adore?" "Him," says Pionius, "that made heaven and earth." "You mean him that was crucified?" "I mean him whom God the Father sent for the salvation of men." "We must," said the judges one to another, "compel them to say what we desire." "Blush," answered

Pionius, "ye adorers of false gods; have some respect to justice, and obey the laws; they enjoin you not to do violence to us, but to put us to death."

One Ruffinus said, "Forbear, Pionius, your thirst after vain-glory." "Is this your eloquence?" answered the martyr: "Is this what you have read in your books? Was not Socrates thus treated by the Athenians? According to your advice he sought after vain-glory, because he applied himself to wisdom and virtue." A case thus apposite, and which doubtless bore some resemblance, as the philosopher's zeal for moral virtue exposed him to persecution, struck Ruffinus dumb.

A certain person placed a crown on Pionius' head, which he tore, and the pieces lay before the altar. The Pagans, finding their persuasions vain, remanded them to prison.

A few days after the proconsul Quintilian returned to Smyrna and examined Pionius. He tried both tortures and persuasions in vain, and at length, enraged at his obstinacy, sentenced him to be burnt alive. He went cheerfully to the place of execution, and thanked God who had preserved his body pure from idolatry. Then he stretched himself out upon the wood, and delivered himself to a soldier to be nailed to the pile. After he was fastened, the executioner said to him, "Change your mind, and the nails shall be taken away." "I have felt them," answered he. After remaining thoughtful for a time, he said, "I hasten, O Lord, that I may the sooner be raised up again." They then lifted him up, fastened to the wood, and afterwards one Metrodorus, a marcionite. They were turned toward the east, Pionius on the right hand and Metrodorus on the left. They heaped round them a great quantity of wood. Pionius remained some time motionless, with his eyes shut, absorbed in prayer while the fire was consuming him. Then at length he opened his eyes, and looking cheerfully on the fire, said, "Amen," and expired saying, "Lord, receive my soul." Of the

particular manner in which his companions suffered death we have no account.

I have extracted a considerable part of this narrative, in which we see the spirit of divine charity triumphing over all worldly and selfish considerations. The zeal of Pionius deserves to be commemorated while the world endures. It seems to have led him to a forgetfulness of himself, and to have absorbed him in the vindication of divine truth to the last. One may judge what a faithful preacher of the gospel he had been, who seems intent on the blessed work amidst his bitterest sufferings. What true religion is in its simplicity, seems in him exemplified abundantly.

If there is any thing particular in the treatment he underwent, it consists in the repeated pains taken to preserve him. Is it that the man was much respected, though the christian was abhorred? Integrity and uprightness, when eminent and supported by wisdom and good sense, fail not to overawe, to captivate, and to soften mankind. The voice of nature will speak for them, but they cannot conquer the natural enmity of the heart against God.

There are many good reasons which may be assigned why sound learning ought to be cultivated among christians, especially by all who mean to be pastors of Christ's flock. This the case of Pionius obviously intimates. A character for knowledge never fails to ensure respect. It is not money, nor rank, nor power, nor quality, that will command esteem: Knowledge secures it a thousand times more with mankind. It is evident that Pionius was a man of learning, and that his persecutors respected him on that account, and took pains to preserve him. We may conceive how useful this accomplishment had been in his ministry.

One remark more on this story. A montanist and a marcionite are his fellow-sufferers. The latter is consumed with him in the flames. Doubtless, from all the lights of antiquity, both these heresies appear in an odious light. But there might be exceptions, and who so likely as those who suffered? We must not confine

the truth of godliness to any particular denomination. Providence, by mixing persons of very opposite parties in the same scene of persecution, demonstrates that the pure faith and love of Jesus may operate in those who cannot own each other as brethren : I know not whether Pionius and Metrodorus did so on earth ; I hope they do so in heaven.

In Asia one Maximus a merchant was brought before Optimus the proconsul, who inquired after his condition ? “ I was born free,” says he, “ but I am the servant of Jesus Christ.” “ Of what profession are you ?” “ A man of the world, who live by my dealings.” “ Are you a christian ?” “ Though a sinner, yet I am a christian.” The usual process was carried on of persuasions and tortures. “ These are not torments which we suffer for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ ; they are wholesome unctions.” Such the effect of the Holy Ghost shedding the love of God in Christ abroad in the human heart ! He was ordered to be stoned to death.*

All this time the persecution raged in Egypt with unremitting fury. In the lower Thebais there was a young man named Paul, to whom, at fifteen years of age, his parents left a great estate. He was a person of much learning, of a mild temper, and full of the love of God. He had a married sister with whom he lived. Her husband was base enough to design an information against him, in order to obtain his estate. Paul, having notice of this, retired to the desert mountains, where he waited till the persecution ceased. Habit, at length, made solitude agreeable to him. He found a pleasant retreat, and lived there fourscore and ten years. He was at the time of his retirement twenty-three, and lived to be an hundred and thirteen years old.† This is the first distinct account of an hermit in the christian church. No doubt ought to be made of the genuine piety of Paul. Those who in our days condemn all monks with indiscriminate contempt, seem to forget what times they live in themselves, and what times the

* Fleury b. 6—40.

† Fleury b. 6—48.

first monks lived in. Was not solitude better than such society as that which christians were exposed to in the days of Decius ? Was there a day, an hour in which they had the least enjoyment of society, or security of any of its benefits ? What could a christian eye or ear observe but what must be exceedingly distasteful to him ? Paul loving solitude in such circumstances is no more to be wondered at than Elijah the prophet. But he carried it too far. With the return of peace the return of social duties should have taken place. Yet a heart breathing the purest love to God may naturally enough be led to think the perfection of godliness attainable only in solitude. The increasing spirit of superstition soon produced a number of Pauls. The worst effect of it was, that those who had only external religion placed their righteousness in monastic austerities ; and thus, from the depraved imitations of well-meant beginnings, one of the strongest supports of false religion gradually strengthened itself in the christian world.

And here we close the account of the Decian persecution. Its author is admired by Pagan writers. What has been said of Trajan and Antoninus, moralists, but persecutors, is applicable to him. It cannot be denied, that for thirty months the prince of darkness had full opportunity to glut his rage. But the Lord meant to chasten and to purify his church, not to destroy. The whole scene is memorable on several accounts. It was not a local or intermitting persecution, but universal, and must have transmitted great numbers to the regions where sin and pain shall be no more. The peace of thirty years had corrupted the whole christian atmosphere. The lightning of the Decian rage refined and cleared it. No doubt the effects were salutary to the church. Without such a scourge external christianity might have still spread, and internal have been no more. The survivors had an opportunity to learn what the gospel is, in the faithfulness of the martyrs ; and men were taught again, that he alone who strengthens christians to suffer, can make true christians. Yet the storm

proved fatal to a number of individuals who apostatized, and christianity was cleared of many false friends. Two other evils we have also seen. The formation of schisms and of superstitious solitudes had their date from the Decian persecution.



CHAPTER XII.

The History of the Church during the Reign of Gallus.

THE successor of Decius gave the church a little pause. In that space the two little treatises of Cyprian concerning the lapsed and concerning unity, were doubtless of some service in disposing the minds of men to preserve the unity of the church, and in recovering the lapsed to a state of penitence. In the latter of these treatises indeed it must be confessed he carries his censure of the Novatians too far. The sin and the danger of rending the body of Christ might have been stated in the strongest terms. To pronounce the evil absolutely damnable was carrying the matter beyond the bounds of moderation. But the same candour which should incline one to apprehend Novatian meant well in his too rigid scheme, pleads also for Cyprian's zeal in the maintenance of unity. He seems to have felt the evil as most destructive, and knows not terms strong enough to express his detestation of it.

But Gallus soon began to disturb the peace of the church, though not with the incessant fury of his predecessor. One Hyppolitus, a Roman presbyter, had been seduced into Novatianism; but his mind had not been perverted from the faith and love of Jesus. He was now called on to suffer martyrdom, which he did with courage and fidelity. Either curiosity or a desire of instructive information induced some to ask him in the last scene of his sufferings, whether he still persisted in the communion of Novatian? He declared in the most explicit terms, that he now saw the affair in a new light,

repented of his having encouraged the schism, and died in the communion of the general church. One may conceive such a testimony must have weakened the influence of the schism.*

In this persecution of Gallus it was that Cornelius confessed the faith of Christ, and was banished to Civita Vecchia by the emperor, which gave occasion to the congratulatory letter of Cyprian; in one part of it he reflects on the Novatians with his usual vehemence. The rest breathes a fervent spirit of piety and charity, and throws a strong light on two facts, both that the persecution of Gallus was severe, and that the Roman christians bore it with becoming and exemplary fortitude.

“We have known, dearest brother, the glorious testimonies of your faith and virtue, and we have received the honour of your confession with such exultation, that, in the praises of your excellent conduct, we reckon ourselves partners and companions. For, as we have but one church, united hearts and indivisible concord, what pastor rejoices not in the honours of his fellow-pastors as his own? Or what brotherhood does not every where exult in the joy of brothers? We cannot express how great was our exultation and joy when we heard of your prosperous fortitude; that you were at Rome the leader of the confession, but that the confession of the leader grew with the confession of the brethren, that while you led the way to glory, you incited many companions of your glory, and persuaded the people to confess, while you were prepared to confess for them all; so that we are at a loss which most to celebrate, your active and steady faith, or the inseparable charity of the brethren. The virtue of the bishop leading the way was publicly approved, the union of the brethren following him was exhibited. While one mind and one voice was among you all, the whole Roman church confessed. Your faith which the apostle so much celebrated shone illustriously. He foresaw in spirit this firmness of yours, and while he commends the fathers

* Fleury, b. 7. x.

he stirs up the sons to imitation. While you are thus unanimous and firm, your example is most instructive. Ye have taught largely the great lessons of fearing God, of firmly adhering to Christ, of uniting pastors and people in one common danger, of uniting brethren with brethren in persecution, that a concord thus united is invincible; that the God of peace gives to the peacemakers that which is jointly asked by all. With terrible violence the adversary rushed to attack the soldiers of Christ, but was bravely repulsed.

He hoped again to supplant the servants of God, as rude novices and improvident. He hoped to circumvent one of the faithful. But he found the united resistance of all the faithful. He understood that the soldiers of Christ stand sober and armed to the battle, that they cannot be conquered; that they may die, and are invincible on this very account, because they fear not to die; that they resist not aggressors, since it is not lawful for them, though innocent, to kill the guilty,* but that they readily give up life and blood; that while wickedness and cruelty rage so fiercely in the world, they may the more quickly depart from the evil. What a glorious spectacle under the eyes of God! What a joy in the sight of Christ and his church, that not a single soldier, but the whole army together, endured the the warfare! For if they could have heard, all would have come, since every one came who heard. How many lapsed are restored by a glorious confession! They stood firm; and by the very grief of their penitence were made more magnanimous; their former fall may now appear to have been the effect of sudden tremour: they now return to themselves, collecting real faith and strength from the fear of God, and pant for martyrdom.

As much as possible we exhort our people not to cease to be prepared for the approaching contest, by watching, fasting, and prayers. Let our groans and

* A plain proof of the passiveness of christians, still continued from the apostolic age, under the most unjust treatment.

supplications be frequent. These are our celestial arms ; these our fortresses and weapons. Let us remember one another, unanimous and united, praying for one another, and relieving our pressures and distresses with mutual charity. And whichever of us shall first be called hence, let our love persevere before the Lord, let not our prayers cease before the mercy of our Father, for the brethren and sisters.”

So ardent was the spirit of Cyprian in the expectation of martyrdom ! So little account did he make of temporal things ! and in so natural and easy a manner did he count these terrible scenes as matter of joy ; but he was reserved beyond the life of Gallus as well as Decius for the use of the church. Of Cornelius’ death we have no particular account ; only we know he died in exile. The faithfulness of his sufferings for Christ evinces all along whose servant he was. In other respects I know little or no evidence of his character, nor can I conceive highly of his parts and capacity from the little specimen which we have of his writings.

It is no wonder that Cyprian, who had seen and known such dreadful devastations under Decius, finding, after a very short interval, the persecution renewed by Gallus, should be tempted to imagine the approach of Antichrist, the end of the world, and the day of judgment to be at hand. Sagacious and holy men are never more apt to be deceived than when they attempt to look into futurity. God hath made the present so much the exclusive object of our duty, that he will scarce suffer any of his best and wisest servants to gain any credit, in conjecturing concerning the times and the seasons, which he hath put in his own power. The persecution of Gallus proved however a light one compared with that of Decius. Under very formidable apprehensions of it Cyprian wrote an animating letter to the people of Thibarîs.* The mistaken idea I have mentioned may have added spirit to the Epistle ; but its grounds are solid, and his arguments and the scriptures

* Epis. 56.

which he quotes deserve attention in all ages. A few extracts may be sufficient.

“I had intended, most dear brethren, and wished, if circumstances had permitted, agreeably to the desires you have frequently expressed, to have myself come among you, and to the best of my poor endeavours to have strengthened the brotherhood with exhortations. But urgent affairs detain me at Carthage, I cannot make excursions into a country so distant as yours, nor be long absent from my people. Let these letters then speak for me.

“You ought to be well assured, that the day of affliction is at hand, and that the end of the world and the time of Antichrist is near, that we may all stand prepared for the battle, and think only of the glory of eternal life and the crown of christian confession. Nor ought we to think that the imminent persecution will resemble the last; a heavier and more ferocious conflict hangs over us, for which the soldiers of Christ ought to prepare themselves with sound faith and vigorous fortitude, considering that they* daily drink the cup of the blood of Christ, for this reason, that they may be able themselves to shed their blood for Christ. To follow what Christ hath taught and done is to be willing to be found with Christ. As John the apostle says, “He that saith he abideth in Christ, ought himself also to walk even as he walked.” Thus also the blessed apostle Paul exhorts and teaches, saying, “We are the sons of God, and if sons, then heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if we suffer with him that we may be also glorified together.” Let no man desire any thing now which belongs to a perishing world, but let him follow Christ who lives for ever, and makes his servants to live, who are settled in the faith of his name. For the time is come, most dear brethren, which our Lord long ago foretold, saying, “The hour is coming, when whosoever killeth you will think he doeth God service.” In

* The daily reception of the Lord's supper appears to have been the practice of the African church at that time

his usual manner he quotes the scriptures which relate to persecution ; the force and beauty of which would then be felt and admired, but which we are too apt to speculate upon at our ease.

See how justly he arms their minds against the discouragement which the circumstances of approaching persecution are apt to induce. "Let no one, when he sees our people to be scattered through fear of persecution, be disturbed ; because he sees not the brethren collected, nor the bishops employed among them. Those who must not kill, and who must be killed, cannot be all together. Wherever in those days any one of the brethren shall be separated from the flock by the necessity of the time, in body, nor in spirit, let him not be moved at the horror of the flight, nor while he retreats and lies hid be terrified at the solitude of the desert. He is not alone to whom Christ is a companion in flight. He is not alone who, keeping the temple of God, wherever he is, is not without God ; and if a robber oppress a christian, flying in the desert and mountains, a wild beast attack, famine, thirst, or cold afflict, or the tempest oppress by sea, Christ beholds his soldier fighting in all these various ways." He goes on to set forth the precedents of scripture-saints who suffered for God in the most ancient times, and adds, "How shameful must it be for a christian to be unwilling to suffer when the Master suffered first ; and that we should be unwilling to suffer for our sins, when he who had no sin of his own suffered for us.* The Son of God suffered that he might make us the sons of God ; and shall not a son of man be willing to suffer that he persevere in his sonship ?

Antichrist is come, but Christ comes also after him. The enemy rages and is fierce, but the Lord immediately follows, and will avenge our sufferings and wounds." He again makes apposite scripture quota-

* I have translated this literally. The difference between suffering for our sins and suffering for us is striking ; the first may be corrective, the second is by imputation. Cyprian believed the atonement of Christ, and therefore varied his phraseology to prevent mistakes.

tions. That from the Apocalypse is remarkable, "If any man worship the beast and his image, &c. *Rev.* xiv. 9.

"O what a glorious day will come, when the Lord shall begin to recount his people, and adjudge their rewards; to send the guilty into hell, and to condemn our persecutors to the perpetual fire of penal flame, and to bestow on us the reward of faith and devotedness to him. What glory! what joy! to be admitted to see God, to be honoured, to partake of the joy of eternal light and salvation with Christ the Lord YOUR GOD; to salute Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the patriarchs, and prophets, apostles, and martyrs; to joy with the righteous, the friends of God, in the pleasures of immortality: When that revelation shall come, when the beauty of God shall shine upon us, we shall be as happy as the deserters and rebellious will be miserable in inextinguishable fire." Such are the views of the next life which Cyprian sets before christians. The palm of heavenly-mindedness belonged to these persecuted saints. I wish we, with all our theological accuracy, may reach a measure of their simple zeal, while we live enjoying the good things of this life.

Lucius was chosen bishop of Rome instead of Cornelius, but was immediately driven into exile by the authority of Gallus. Cyprian congratulated him both on his promotion and on his sufferings. His exile must have been of short duration. He was permitted to return to Rome in the year 252, and a second congratulatory letter was written to him by Cyprian.* He suffered death however soon after, and was succeeded by Stephen. The episcopal seat at Rome was then, it seems, the next door to martyrdom.

It was not owing to any diminution of his usual zeal and activity, that the African bishop was still preserved alive, while three of his contemporaries at Rome, Fabian, Cornelius, and Lucian, died a violent death or in exile. About this time he dared to write an Epistle to a noted persecutor of those times, one Demetrianus,

* *Epis.* 58.

and with great freedom and dignity exposed the unreasonableness of the Pagans in charging the miseries of the times on the christians. There will be no necessity to give any detail of his reasonings on the subject. Paganism has at this day no defenders. The latter part of the Epistle, which is exhortatory and doctrinal, shall be afterwards considered, when we come to make an estimate of Cyprian's theological works.

The short reign of Gallus was distinguished by so large a collection of human miseries, as to give a plausible colour to Cyprian's mistake of the near approach of the end of the world. A dreadful pestilence broke out in Africa, which daily carried off numberless persons, and swept away whole houses. The Pagans were alarmed beyond measure, neglected the burial of the dead through fear, and violated the duties of humanity. The bodies of many lay in the streets of Carthage, and in vain seemed to ask the pity of passengers.* It was on this occasion that the Lord stirred up the spirit of christians to shew the practical superiority of their religion, and Cyprian exhibited one of the most brilliant proofs of his real character. He gathered together his people, and expatiated on the subject of mercy. He pointed out to them, that if they did no more than others, the heathen and the publican, in shewing mercy to their own, there would be nothing so admirable in that; that christians ought to overcome evil with good, and like their heavenly Father to love their enemies, since he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. Why does not he, who professes himself a son of God, imitate the example of his Father? We ought to answer to our birth, and those, who appear to be born again of God, should not degenerate, but should be solicitous to evidence the genuineness of their relation to God by the imitation of his goodness. Much more than this Pontius tells us was said by him. But Pontius is very scanty in his informations.

* Vit. Pon'

The eloquent voice of Cyprian was attended to by the people with their usual alacrity. The christians ranked themselves into classes to relieve the public calamity. The rich contributed largely, the poor (and they were many) gave what they could, their labour with extreme hazard of their lives, and the Pagans saw with admiration what the love of God in Christ can do, and beheld their own selfishness and inferiority.

The dreadful calamity of the plague gave to Cyprian an opportunity of pressing on his people, what in truth had been the ruling passion of his own life since his conversion, a warm and active regard for the blessings of immortality, joined with an holy indifference for things below. He published on this occasion his short treatise on mortality. He who wrote it must have felt what all need to feel, how little a thing life is, how valuable the prospect of heavenly bliss. Take a few extracts; the whole is in truth very precious.

“The kingdom of God, my dearest brethren, has begun to be just at hand. The reward of life, the joy of eternal salvation, perpetual gladness, and the possession of paradise lately lost, come to us now as the world passes away; heavenly things now succeed earthly, great things small, and eternal those that are fading. What room is there here for anxiety and solicitude? Who amidst these things is sad and disconcerted, unless to whom faith and hope are wanting? It is his part to fear death who is unwilling to go to Christ; It is his to be unwilling to go to Christ who does not believe that he may begin to reign with Christ, for it is written, “the just shall live by faith.” If you are just and live by faith, if you really believe in God, why do not you, secure of the promise of Christ and of being soon with him, embrace his call, and bless yourselves that you shall be no more exposed to Satan?” After having made an apposite use of the case of good old Simcon, he adds, “that indeed is our peace, that is our sound tranquillity, that is firm and stable, and perpetual security. But what else is carrying on in the world than a daily conflict with Satan? If one sin be subdued, another must

be fought with. Here is no rest from war. You are provoked to curse; the Divine law forbids it; to swear; it is not lawful. Certainly amidst such constant pressures we ought the more to long and wish to hasten to Christ by a more speedy exit, he himself instructing us, "Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." Who does not wish to be free from sorrow? Who would not run to take possession of joy? Since then to see Christ is joy, and our joy cannot be full till we see Christ, what blindness, what infatuation is it, to love the penal pressures and tears of the world, and not to hasten rather to joy which shall not pass away!

The cause of this, dear brethren, is unbelief, because we none of us believe really and solidly those things to be true which the God of truth promises, whose word is eternally firm to those that believe. If a man of a grave and respectable character promised you any thing, you would give him credit, nor doubt his promises, because you know him to be a faithful and consistent character. Now God talks with you, and do you waver in uncertainty? To you departing out of this world God promises immortality, and do you doubt? This is not to know God at all; this is to offend Christ the Lord and Master of believers with the sin of unbelief; this is for a man, placed in the church, to have no faith in the Lord of faith. "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain," says the blessed apostle. Computing it to be gain indeed, no longer to be detained in the snares of the world, no longer to be obnoxious to sin and the flesh, exempt from excruciating pressures, and freed from the poisonous jaws of Satan, to go to the joys of eternal salvation on the call of Christ."

Some of his people being staggered in their minds, because they found christians as liable to the plague as others, he shews that God's people in spirit indeed are separated from the rest of mankind, in all other respects are obnoxious to the common evils of human life. In

efits of afflictions, and the opportunity, which a distress like the present gave to christians, of shewing what spirit they are of. "Let that man fear to die," says he, "who is not born of water and the spirit, and is obnoxious to hell ; let them fear to die who are not partakers of the cross and passion of Christ ; let him fear to die who is to pass from the first to the second death, whom, receding from the world, eternal flame will torment with perpetual punishment ; let him fear to die who gains by life only a delay of judgment. The just are called to refreshment, the unjust to torture ; by the fear of mortality the luke-warm are inflamed, the remiss are awakened, the idle are rouzed, deserters are compelled to return, Gentiles are compelled to believe, the ancient people among the faithful are called to rest ; a new and copious army is collected with fresh strength, to fight when war shall come, who entered into the service in the time of mortality.

We should consider and think again and again, that we have renounced the world, and live here as strangers. Let us embrace the day which assigns to each of us his home. What stranger loves not to return to his country ? a great number of dear friends there await us ; what a great and common joy to see and embrace them !"

It was a season of various calamity, and the active, as well as the passive graces of Cyprian, were kept in perpetual exercise. The madness of men has ever been generating the horrors and miseries of war, and there have never been wanting poets and historians to celebrate the praises of those blood-thirsty villains, who call the desolation of the species their glory. It belongs to narrations purely christian to give renown to the actions of saints, whom the world despise, but whom the grace of God leads to the exercise of real charity to God and man. Behold another instance of Cyprian's benevolence in Christ Jesus. Numidia, the country adjoining to Carthage, had been blessed with the light of the gospel, and a number of churches were planted in it. By an irruption of the barbarous nations, who

his usual manner he supports his precepts by scripture examples, and speaks eloquently and solidly of the ben- neither owned the Roman sway, nor had the least acquaintance with christianity, a number of Numidian christians were carried into captivity. Eight bishops, Januarius, Maximus, Proculus, Victor, Modianus, Nemesian, Nampulus, and Honoratus, wrote the mournful account to the prelate at Carthage. What he felt and did on the occasion his own answer will best explain. The love of Christ and the influence of his spirit will appear to have been not small in the African church from this and the foregoing case; nor will the calamities of the times and the scourge of persecution seem to have been sent to them in vain.*

“With much heart-felt sorrow and tears we read your letters, dearest brethren, which you wrote to us in the solicitude of your love concerning the captivity of our brethren and sisters. For who would not grieve in such cases? or who would not reckon the grief of his brother his own? since the apostle Paul says, “If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; if one member rejoice, all the other members rejoice with it;” and elsewhere, “Who is weak, and I am not weak?” Therefore now the captivity of our brethren is to be reckoned our captivity, and the grief of those who are in danger is to be reckoned as our own grief, since we are all one body, and not only love, but religion, ought to incite us to redeem the members of the brethren. For since the apostle says again, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” Even if love should not induce us to help our brethren, yet in such circumstances we ought to consider, that they are the temples of God, which are taken, and we ought not by a long delay and neglect to suffer the temples of God to remain in captivity, but to labour with all our might, and quickly to shew our obsequiousness to Christ our Judge, OUR LORD AND OUR GOD. For whereas Paul the apostle says, “As many

* Epis. 60. Pam.

of you as have been baptized into Christ, have been baptized into his death ;” in our captive brethren Christ is to be looked at, and redeemed from the danger of captivity, who redeemed us from the danger of death, that so he, who snatched us from the jaws of Satan, may now himself, even he who dwells and inhabits in us, be snatched from the hands of barbarians, and may be redeemed by a sum of money, who redeemed us by his cross and blood :* who for that reason suffers these things to be done, that our faith may be tried, whether we be willing to do for another what every one would wish to be done for himself, were he a prisoner among the barbarians. For who, if he is a father, would not reckon now his sons to be in a state of captivity ? Who, if a husband, would not reckon his wife to be in that calamitous situation, if we feel as men and know what sympathy means ? But how great is our common sorrow and vexation for the danger of virgins who are there held in bondage. Not only their slavery, but the loss of their chastity is to be deplored ; the bonds of barbarians are not so much to be deplored as the lewdness of men, lest members, dedicated to Christ and devoted† forever to the honour of continency, should be defiled and insulted by the lusts of men.

Our brethren, having contemplated all these things with grief, have freely and largely contributed to their relief in the power of faith, ever prone to the work of God, but now much more quickened by sorrow to such salutary works. For whereas the Lord says in the gospel, “ I was sick, and ye visited me ;” with how much stronger approbation would he say, “ I was a captive, and ye redeemed me !” and when again he says, “ I was in prison, and ye came to me ;” how much more is it for him to say, “ I was in the prison of captivity and lay shut up and bound as among barbarians, and

* Redemption by the blood of Jesus, union and fellowship with him maintained in the soul by faith, and the returns of love answerable to his loving kindness, these are the principles of christian benevolence.

† Voluntary celibacy, I apprehend, was in growing repute in the church at that time. St. Paul’s advice in the 7th of first Cor. had then many followers, but monastic vows had yet no existence.

ye freed me from the prison of slavery, to receive your reward of the Lord at the day of judgment !”

Truly we thank you very much that ye wished us to be partakers of your solicitude, and of a work so good and necessary, that ye might offer us fertile fields in which we might deposit the seeds of our hope with an expectation of an exuberant harvest. We have sent a hundred thousand sesterces, the collection of our clergy and laity* of the church of Carthage, which you will dispense according to your diligence. Heartily do we wish that no such thing may happen again, and that the Lord may protect our brethren from such calamities. But if, to try our faith and love, such afflictions should again befall you, hesitate not to certify us, assuring yourselves of the hearty concurrence of our church with you in prayer and in cheerful contributions.

But that you may remember our brethren, who have cheerfully contributed, in your prayers, I have subjoined the names of each ; I have added also the names of our colleagues in the ministry, who were present and contributed, in their own names, and in that of the people, and, besides my own proper quantity, I have set down and sent their sums. For us all I trust you will think yourselves bound to pray. We wish you, brethren, always prosperity.”

To one Cæcilius, an African bishop, he wrote about this time, to correct a practice in administering the Lord's supper, which had crept into some churches, of using water instead of wine. The necessity of wine in the ordinance, as a proper emblem of the blood of Christ, he insists on with arguments drawn from the scriptures. But let it suffice to have barely mentioned such a subject as this.

Soon after the appointment of Stephen to the bishopric of Rome, Gallus was slain, after a wretched reign of eighteen months, in the year 253.

* About 781 l. 5 s. sterling. See Notes to Epis. 62, Oxford Edit.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Pacific Part of Valerian's Reign.

UNDER Valerian, the successor of Gallus, the church was allowed a longer truce. For that under Gallus seems to have been very short and precarious. But for upwards of three years the people of God found in Valerian even a friend and protector. His house was full of christians and he had a strong predilection in their favour.

The Lord exercises his people in various ways ; there are virtues adapted to a state of prosperity as well as of adversity. The wisdom and love of God, which directed the late terrible persecutions, have in part appeared by the excellent fruits. Let us now collect as we can the works of christians during this interval of refreshment.

It is not pleasant to leave a guide, while we may have him with us. If Cyprian's affairs detain us long, it is because his eloquent pen still attends us. Doubtless there were many before his time, whose christian actions would have equally deserved to be commemorated. But the materials of information are wanting ; his letters must still be to us a capital source of historical instruction.

A council was held in Africa by sixty-six bishops, with Cyprian at their head, during this peace, to settle, no doubt, various matters relating to the church of Christ. I imagine all these bishops to have had each small dioceses, and to have superintended them with the assistance of their clergy according to what I conceive to have been the primitive mode of church-government, and suppose them to have paid a real regard to their flocks, which was doubtless the case with very many of them at that time. The face of Africa, which is now covered with Mahometan, idolatrous, and piratical wickedness, afforded in those days a very pleasing

spectacle. We have no further account of this council than what is contained in Cyprian's letter,* which I shall take notice of presently. But it is unreasonable to suppose that the two points mentioned in it were all that engaged the attention of the council. Probably matters much more important than either of them were reviewed. Certainly no schemes of political ambition, of wealth, or of power, were then practised by christian bishops. On the whole then, I must judge the synod worthy of the christian name, especially as many of the bishops had faithfully maintained the cause of Christ during scenes of trial the most severe that can be imagined.

One Victor, a presbyter, had been received into the church without having undergone the legitimate time of trial in a state of penance, and without the concurrence and consent of the people. His bishop Therapius had done it arbitrarily and contrary to the institutes of the former council for settling such matters. Cyprian, in the name of the council, contents himself with reprimanding Therapius; but yet confirms what he had done, and warns him to take care of offending in future.

This is one of the points. We see hence that a strict and godly discipline, on the whole, now prevailed in the church, and that the wisest and most successful methods of recovering the lapsed were used. The authority of bishops was firm, but not despotic; and the share of the people, in matters of discipline, by this letter appears worthy of notice.

The other part he thus explains in the same letter addressed to Fidus: "As to the care of infants, of whom you said that they ought not to be baptized within the second or third day after their birth, and that the ancient law of circumcision should be so far repeated, that they ought not to be baptized till the eighth day, we were all of a very different opinion. The mercy and grace of God we all judged should be denied to none. For if the Lord says in his gospel, *the Son of*

* Epis. 59.

Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them, how ought we to do our utmost, as far as in us lies, that no soul be lost ! Spiritual circumcision should not be impeded by carnal circumcision. If even to the foulest offenders, when they afterwards believe, remission of sins is granted, and none is prohibited from baptism and grace : how much more should an infant be admitted, who, just born, hath not sinned at all, except that being carnally born according to Adam, he hath contracted the contagion of ancient death in his first birth ; who approaches to remission of sins the more easily, because not his own actual guilt, but that of another, is remitted.

“ Our sentence therefore, dearest brother, in the council was, that none by us should be prohibited from baptism and the grace of God, who is merciful and kind to all.”

I purpose carefully to avoid disputes on subjects of small moment. Yet to omit a word here on a point, which hath produced volumes of strife, might seem almost a studied affectation ; on such occasions I shall only pacifically state my own views, as they appear deducible from evidence. Instead of disputing whether the right of infant baptism is to be derived from scripture alone, and whether tradition deserves any attention at all, I shall observe, though the scripture itself seems to speak for infant baptism,* that tradition in matters of custom and discipline is of real weight, as appears from the confession of all ; for all are glad to support their cause by it, if they can ; and in the present case, to those who say that the custom of baptizing children was not derived from the apostolical ages, the traditional argument may fairly run in language nearly scriptural, “ If any man seem to be contentious,” we have never had such a custom as that of confining baptism to adults, nor the churches of God.†

Here is an assembly of sixty-six pastors, men of approved fidelity and gravity, who have stood the fiery

* 1 Cor. vii. 14.

† 1 Cor. xi. 16.

trial of some of the severest persecutions ever known, and who have testified their love to the Lord Jesus Christ, in a more striking manner than any antipædo-baptists have had an opportunity of doing in our days ; and if we may judge of their religious views by those of Cyprian, and they are all in perfect harmony with him, they are not wanting in any fundamental of godliness. No man in any age more revered the scriptures, and made more copious use of them on all occasions than he did ; and, it must be confessed, in the very best manner. For he uses them continually for practice, not for ostentation ; for use, not for the sake of victory in argument. Before this holy assembly a question is brought, not whether infants should be baptized at all, none contradicted this, but whether it is right to baptize them immediately, or on the eighth day. To a man they all determined to baptize them immediately. This transaction passed in the year 253. Let the reader consider : if infant baptism had been an innovation, it must have been now of a considerable standing : the disputes concerning Easter and other very uninteresting points shew, that such an innovation must have formed a remarkable era in the church. The number of heresies and divisions had been very great. Among them all such a deviation from apostolical practice as this must have been remarked. To me it appears impossible to account for this state of things, but on the footing that it had ever been allowed, and therefore that the custom was that of the first churches. Though then I should wave the argument drawn from that sentence of St. Paul, “ Else were your children unclean, but now are they holy ;” (and yet I must confess I cannot understand it to mean any thing else than infant baptism) I am under a necessity of concluding, that the enemies of infant baptism are mistaken. Yet I see not why they may not serve God in sincerity, as well as those who are differently minded. The greatest evil lies in the want of charity, and in that contentious eagerness, with which singularity in little things is apt to be attended. Really good men

have not always been free from this, perhaps few on the whole cultivated larger and more generous views than the African prelate ; yet in one instance we shall presently see he was seduced into a bigotry of spirit not unlike that which I am censuring.

I could have wished that christian people had never been vexed with a controversy so frivolous as this about baptism, and having, once for all, given my views and the reasons of them, I turn from the subject, and observe further, that there is in the extract of the letter before us a strong and clear testimony of the faith of the ancient church concerning original sin. One may safely reason in the same way as in the case just now considered, but the fulness of scripture concerning so momentous a point precludes the necessity of traditional arguments. A lover of divine truth will be glad however to learn that christians in the middle of the third century did believe, without contradiction, that men were born in sin and under the wrath of God through Adam's transgression, conceiving themselves as one with him, and involved with him in the consequences of his offence. Modern self-conceit may say to this what it pleases ; but thus thought ancient christians in general, and the very best christians too, with whom was the spirit of Christ in a powerful degree. The just consequence of such facts is not always attended to by those who are concerned in it. " Yes, but reason should be attended to." So I say ; but what is right reason ? To submit to the testimony of the Divine Word. This alone is sufficient and is above all ; if men will not abide by this, it is not unreasonable to tell them, that their strained interpretations of scripture are confuted by the sense of the primitive church, who had every opportunity of knowing the truth ; that to deduce scripture doctrines from what we should fancy to be reasonable, is not reason, but pride ; that an argument drawn from settling the question, " What did the ancient christians think of these things ?" deserves some attention ; but that an argument drawn from our own fancies, what we think *ought* to be in scripture, deserves

none at all. It may be called the language of philosophy; nothing is more confused than the use of that term in our days; but it is not the language of one disposed to *hear the word of God and to do it*.

A private case, which must have happened in time of peace, and therefore may properly be referred to this time, will deserve, for the light which it throws on primitive christian manners, to be distinctly recorded.

“*Cyprian to Eucratius his brother*. Health. Your love and esteem have induced you, dearest brother, to consult me as to what I think of the case of a player among you; who still continues in the same infamous art, and as a teacher of boys, not to be instructed but to be ruined by him, instructs others in that which he himself hath miserably learnt. You ask whether he should be allowed the continuance of christian communion? I think it very inconsistent with the majesty of God, and the rules of his gospel, that the modesty and honour of the church should be defiled by so base and infamous a contagion. In the law men are prohibited to wear female attire, and are pronounced accursed; how much more criminal must it be not only to put on women’s garments, but also to express lascivious, obscene, and effeminate gestures in a way of instructing others!

“And let no man excuse himself as having left the theatre, while yet he undertakes to qualify others for the work. You cannot say that he has ceased from a business, who provides substitutes in his room, and instead of one only, furnishes the playhouse with a number; teaching them, contrary to the divine ordinance, how the male may be reduced into a female and the sex be changed by art; and how Satan may be gratified by the defilement of the divine workmanship. If the man makes poverty his excuse, his necessities may be relieved in the same manner as those of others, who are maintained by the alms of the church, provided he be content with frugal, but innocent food, and do not fancy that we are to hire him by a salary to cease from sin, since it is not our interest, but his own, that is con-

cerned in this affair. But let his gains from the service of the playhouse be ever so large, what sort of gain is that, which tears men from a participation in the banquet of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and leads them miserably and ruinously fattened in this world to the punishments of eternal famine and thirst? Therefore, as much as you can, recover him from this depravity and infamy to the way of innocence and to the hope of life, that he may be content with a parsimonious, but salutary maintenance from the church. But if your church be insufficient to maintain its poor, he may transfer himself to us,* and here receive what is necessary for food and raiment, and no longer teach pernicious things out of the church, but learn himself salutary things in the church. Dearest son, I wish you constant prosperity.”†

The decision of Cyprian is doubtless that, which piety and good sense would unite to dictate in the case. A player was ever an infamous character at Rome, and was looked on as incapable of filling any of the offices of state. The Romans, at the same time that they shewed in this point their political, evinced the depravity of their moral sense. A set of men were still maintained for the public amusement, whom yet they knew must of necessity be dissolute and dangerous members of society. If this was the judgment of sober Pagans, it is not to be wondered at that the purity of christianity would not even suffer such characters to be admitted into the bosom of the church at all. To say that there are noble sentiments to be found in some dramas answers not the purpose of those, who would vindicate the entertainments of the stage. The support of them requires a system in its own nature corrupt, and which must gratify the voluptuous and the libidinous, or it can have no durable existence. Hence in every age complaints have been made of the corruptions of the stage, and ideas have been thrown out of its great utility,

* Eucratius was the bishop of a place called Thenæ, lying in the military road to Carthage.

† 61 Ep. Pam.

provided it were kept under proper regulations. But who is to regulate it? Were it purged of its viciousness, and made altogether meet for christian eyes and ears, it would cease to be attended at all. While the world is as it is, it must be an engine of corruption. Instruction is looked on in a subordinate light by the gravest advocates for it; pleasure is its capital end, and that pleasure, if a set of men are to subsist by it, will ever be, as it always has been, while mankind are what they are, impure in its nature in a great degree, and a school of impurity.

It required no deep penetration in the first christians to see this, and to reject the stage entirely. A christian renouncing the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and yet frequenting the playhouse, was with them a solecism. The out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, which now for three centuries we are reviewing, never admitted these amusements at all. A professor of the drama, we see, could not be allowed consistently to profess christianity.

It is one of the main designs of this history to shew practically what true christians were, both in principles and manners. The case before us shews them very clearly in this article belonging to the latter. What would Cyprian have said, to see large assemblies of christians so called, devoted to these impurities, and supporting them with all their might, and deriving from them their highest delights? He would at the same time observe the same persons, as might be expected, perfect strangers to the joy of the Holy Ghost. This is consistent enough, only he might wonder why such persons still kept up the name of christians. If he examined their stage entertainments, and compared them with those that were in vogue in his day, he would have seen the same confusion of sexes, the same encouragement of unchaste desires, and the same sensuality, with the same contemptuous ridicule of christianity, if indeed in his time the gospel was burlesqued on a stage, as it has been in ours. In some points the ancient drama might be worse than ours; yet in others

it might be more decent. But as on the whole the spirit and tendency was the same, he would have been astonished that such men could still call themselves christians, that actors and actresses could amass fortunes in a christian country, in which many pastors could scarce find subsistence, and that theologians of great erudition should obtain applause by writing comments on dramatic poets, and by openly enlisting in the service of the stage. *Proh Dolor!*

There was one Fortunatian, bishop of Assuræ, who had lapsed in the time of persecution, and without any marks of repentance still assumed to himself the episcopal character, and insisted on his being received as such by the clergy and people. This case gave occasion to an Epistle of Cyprian to the church,* in which he as strenuously opposes the ambitious claims of the bishop as in like circumstances he had formerly done those of the laity, and he repeats the advice to the lapsed he had before given, cautioning the people against the reception of him in that character. Behold now the strenuous assertor of the rights of faithful bishops openly exposing the pretensions of unworthy ones, and instructing the people to guard themselves against their delusions! What effect his Epistle had does not appear; the weight of his character and the vigour of discipline, now happily prevalent in Africa, make it probable that it had the desired success.

One Rogatian, an African bishop, complained to Cyprian and his colleagues, assembled in a synod, of the insolent and injurious behaviour of a deacon. Cyprian observes, that he might have done himself justice without them. He applies the case of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram to this of the haughty deacon, and takes notice very properly of the humble and unassuming carriage of our Lord toward the impious dignitaries of the Jewish church. "He taught us," says he, "how true pastors ought to be fully and regularly honoured, while he behaved himself so towards false ones."

* Epis. 64.

The following passage is perhaps the most striking proof of any in Cyprian's writings, that the ideas of episcopacy were too lofty, even in that age, and had insensibly grown with the gradual increase of superstition. Let it be remarked as a character of the times, and as an instance of the effect of the spirit of the times on a mind one of the purest and humblest in the world.

"Deacons ought to remember that the Lord chose apostles, that is, bishops and rulers, but the apostles chose to themselves deacons, after his ascent into heaven, as the ministers of their government and of the church. Now if we dare do any thing against God who makes bishops, then may deacons dare to act against us by whom they are appointed."

The comparison is very unseemly, nor ought bishops to be set on the same footing as the apostles; but he is certainly right in observing farther: "These are the beginnings of heresies, and the attempts of ill-disposed schismatics to please themselves and despise with haughtiness their superior;" and he goes on to advise the bishop how to act concerning him, with that happy mixture of firmness and charity, of which, by a peculiarly intuitive discernment, he seldom failed to shew himself a master.*

One Geminius Victor appointed Faustinus, a presbyter, a guardian by his will. In an African synod Cyprian and his colleagues wrote to the church of Furnæ † a protest against the practice. The clergy were then looked on as men wholly devoted to divine things; secular cares were taken out of their hands as much as possible. Let this again be remarked as one of the happy effects of the work of the Holy Ghost on the church.

Novatianism had spread into Gaul, and Marcian, bishop of the church of Arelate, united himself to the schism. Faustinus, bishop of Lyons, wrote both to Cyprian of Carthage and Stephen of Rome on the subject. Other bishops in France wrote also on the sub-

* Epis. 66.

† Epis. 67.

ject. Cyprian supports the same cause with them in a letter to Stephen. The chief reason for mentioning this is to shew how the gospel, which had so gloriously begun at Lyons, in the second century, must now have spread in France to a great degree. Contentions and schisms usually have no place, till after christianity has taken deep root.

The same observation may be made of the progress of the gospel in Spain, where, by the inscriptions of Cyriac of Ancona, it appears that the light of truth had entered in Nero's time. Here two bishops, Basilides and Martial, had deservedly lost their pastoral offices in the church on account of their unfaithfulness in the persecution. Cyprian and his colleagues in council wrote to confirm their deposition, and he shews that the people were no less bound than the clergy to abstain from the communion of such, and supports his argument by the directions of Moses to the children of Israel, "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men." He recommends* that ordinations should be performed in the sight of all the people, that they might all have an opportunity to approve or to condemn the characters of the persons ordained. He takes notice that in Africa the neighbouring bishops used to meet before the people of the place, where the bishop was to be ordained, and the bishop was chosen in the presence of the people, who knew fully the life of each and his whole conversation. He observes that Sabinas, who had been substituted in the room of Basilides, had been ordained in this fair and equitable manner. He censures Basilides for going to Rome, imposing on Stephen, and gaining his consent for his being re-instated. Cyprian thinks his guilt was augmented by his conduct. Martial, it seems, had defiled himself with Pagan abominations, and his deposition, he insists, ought to remain confirmed.

While these things shew the unhappy spirit of human depravity bearing down the most wholesome

* Epis. 68.

fences of discipline, they evince that there were those at that time in the christian world, extremely careful, and that not without success, of the purity of the church. And if ever it should please God to put it into the hearts of those who have power to reform what is amiss among ourselves, better guides and precedents than these, next to the scriptures, are scarcely to be found.

In the year 254 one Pupian, a man of note in the church of Carthage, wrote him a letter complaining of his insolent and haughty conduct in ejecting such members out of the church, and ruling with imperious sway. The African prelate had governed now six years, and had signalized himself equally in persecution and in peace, as the friend of piety, order, and discipline, and had with every temporal and spiritual faculty laid himself out for the good of the falling and distempered church; he saw by this time the great success of his labours, and he must now pay the tax which eminent virtue ever pays to slander and envy, to prevent the risings of pride, and to keep him low before his God. Pupian believed, or affected to believe very unjust rumours which were circulated against his pastor, and said that the scruple of conscience with which he was seized prevented his owning the authority of Cyprian. He himself had suffered during the persecution, and had been faithful, probably a person of Lucian's character both in his virtues and weaknesses, and was disgusted at the backwardness of Cyprian to receive the lapsed. He heavily complained of his severity, while the Novatian party had separated from him on account of his lenity. But the best and wisest of men have ever been most exposed to such inconsistent charges. It does not appear that Pupian was able to raise a second sect of dissenters on opposite grounds to those of the first. We will rather hope, that he saw into his error, and returned into a state of charity with his bishop. A few extracts from Cyprian's answer (for we have not Pupian's letter) may throw still stronger light on the character of Cyprian, and may afford us some salutary reflections.

To the charge of Pupian that he was not possessed of humility, he answers thus: "Which of us is farthest from humility? I who daily serve the brethren, and who with kindness and pleasure receive every one who comes to the church, or you who constitute yourself the bishop of the bishop, and the judge of the judge appointed by God for the time? The Lord, in the gospel, when it was said to him, "Answerest thou the high priest so?" still preserving the respect due to the sacerdotal character, said nothing against the high priest, but only cleared his own innocence; and St. Paul, though he might have exerted himself against those who had crucified the Lord, yet answers, "I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people."

Unless you will say that I was a pastor before the persecution, when you were in communion with me, and after the persecution I ceased to be a pastor. The persecution reaching you, exalted you to the honour of a witness for Christ; me it depressed with a load of a proscription, when the public edict was read, "If any one holds or possesses any thing of the goods of Cæcilius Cyprian, bishop of the christians." Thus even those who believed not God, who appoints the bishop, credited the devil who proscribed him.

I speak not these things in a way of boasting, but with grief, since you set yourself up as a judge of God and his Christ, who says to the apostles, and of consequence to all the bishops, the successors of the apostles, "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that rejecteth you, rejecteth me." Hence heresies and schisms arise and do arise while the bishop who is one, and presides over the church, is despised by the proud presumption of some; for what arrogance is this, to call pastors to your cognizance, and unless they be acquitted at your bar, behold now for six years the brethren have been without a bishop?

You say your scruples must be solved; but why did not those martyrs, full of the Holy Ghost, who suf-

ferred for God and his Christ, indulge those scruples? Why so many of my colleagues, and so many of the people, illustrious for their sufferings? Must all who communicated with me be polluted, according to what you have written, and have lost the hope of eternal life? Pupian, alone upright, inviolable, holy, and chaste, who will not mix with us, will dwell solitary in paradise."

He then exhorts him to return to the bosom of the church; at the same time informs him, that in the matter of receiving him he shall be guided by intimations from the Lord communicated to him, it may be by visions and dreams. This is a language not unusual with Cyprian. He repeatedly speaks of instructions communicated to him in this way. We know too little of the mode of dispensation, the church at that time was under, to judge accurately concerning this language; certainly the age of miracles had not then ceased. Instruction by dreams was very much the method of God in scripture, and it would be an inexcusable temerity to censure a man of such wisdom and veracity, as Cyprian was, by tying him down to our modes of judging. If some expressions in the letter savour of episcopal haughtiness, which was then growing in the church, the main tenor of it contains nothing but what Pupian ought to have attended to. A readiness to believe stories, tending to calumniate the worthiest pastors, is a snare which Satan has too successfully laid for the church in all ages. Much greater circumspection is doubtless due on this head than many are disposed to pay. The brotherly fellowship of churches much depends on this point, their endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Cyprian concludes in this nervous manner: "I have written these things with a pure conscience, and in the confidence of my God. You have my letters, I have yours, both will be recited in the day of judgment before the tribunal of Christ."*

* Epis. 69.

A controversy now arose in the church, while the pacific spirit of Valerian continued to protect it, which reflects no honour on any of the parties concerned in it. The question was, whether persons returning from heresies into the church ought to be re-baptized. The active spirit of Cyprian was employed, partly by a council in Africa, and partly by his letters, in maintaining that the baptism of heretics was null and void, that even Novatian baptism ought to be looked upon in the same light. Stephen of Rome maintained that if they were baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, it was sufficient to receive them into the church by imposition of hands ; and though nothing was at present decided, because no party had power to compel others, yet most christians have agreed long since with Stephen. That the efficacy of a sacrament, rightly administered, depends not on the character of him that administers it, is the voice of good sense as well as of the church of England. But the character which Cyprian had not undeservedly acquired by his labours and sufferings, procured him a much greater degree of strength than either the importance of his cause, or the weight of his arguments merited. Even Firmilian of Cappadocia in a long letter supported his side of the question. He occasionally mentions, in it a story of a woman, about twenty-two years before the date of this letter, who professed herself a prophetess, and for a long time deceived the brethren with her extatic raptures, till one of the exorcists confuted her pretensions. It is worth while just to have mentioned this to shew that delusions have ever been raised by Satan to disgrace the work of God. It appears by his letter* that Stephen behaved with much violence and asperity in the contest, not even admitting to a conference the brethren who came to him from distant parts, who were of Cyprian's opinion, and denying to them the common rights of hospitality. Another circumstance which turns out in the course of this con-

* Epis. 75.

troversy is, that Cyprian justly enough decides that those* whose weak state of health did not permit them to be washed in water, were yet sufficiently baptized by being sprinkled, and observes that the virtue of baptism ought not to be estimated, in a carnal manner, by the quantity of external apparatus.

How weak alas is man! A peace of three years has set the church in a flame among themselves for a trifle! and one of the best and wisest of men, in his day, by his zeal for unity and his care against innovations, is betrayed into the support of an indefensible point of mere ceremony, which tends to the encouragement of superstition and the weakening of brotherly love. How soon do we forget that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost!" With what difficulty is any thing of the real love of Jesus and the fruits of it preserved in the church. All this proves in the strongest manner how mighty and gracious the Lord is in still preserving a church in the earth, how dark and corrupt man is, how active and subtile Satan is, how precious is that blood which cleanses from all sin, and how true is that book which contains such salutary doctrine, and so faithfully describes the misery of man! How safely may its account of the way of salvation be rested on! How pleasing the prospect it exhibits of the church above!

The reader would justly think my time and his own ill spent in unravelling the niceties of this trifling controversy. God has a scourge for his froward children; persecution lowers again with recollected strength, and christians are called on to forget their idle, internal squabbles, to humble themselves before him, and prepare for scenes of horror and desolation.

* Epis. 76

CHAPTER XIV.

The last Acts and Martyrdom of Cyprian.

THE change in the disposition of Valerian towards the christians, which now took place, is one of the most memorable instances of the instability of human characters. More than all his predecessors he was disposed to kindness towards the christians. Not even Philip was so courteous and friendly towards them. His palace was full of the friends of Jesus, and was looked on as a sanctuary. But now after he had reigned three years, he was induced by his favourite Macrianus to commence a deadly persecution. This man dealt largely in magical enchantments and abominable sacrifices, he slaughtered children, and scattered the entrails of new born babes.* The persecution of christians was an exploit worthy of a mind so fascinated with diabolical wickedness and folly. He found in Valerian but too ready a disciple. The persecution began in the year 257, and continued the remainder of his reign, three years and a half. Stephen of Rome appears to have died a natural death about the beginning of it. For there is no evidence of his martyrdom, and we want the proofs which might thence be afforded, whether his turbulent and aspiring spirit was combined with any thing of genuine christianity. He was succeeded by Sixtus.

Cyprian, who had escaped two persecutions, was now made the victim of the third, though by slow degrees, and attended with circumstances of comparative lenity. Every thing relating to him is so interesting, that it may not be amiss to prosecute his story in a connected manner to his death, and to reserve the narrative of other objects of this persecution till afterwards.

* Dyonisius of Alex. Euseb. b. 7, c. 9.

He was seized by the servants of Paternus the pro-consul of Carthage, and brought into his council-chamber. "The sacred emperors, Valerian and Gallienus," says Paternus, "have done me the honour to direct letters to me, in which they have decreed, that all men ought to adore the gods whom the Romans adore, and on pain of being slain with the sword. I have heard that you despise the worship of the gods, whence I advise you to consult for yourself and honour them." "I am a christian," replied the prelate, "and know no god but the one true God, who created heaven and earth, the sea, and all things in them. This God we christians serve ; to him we pray night and day for all men, and even for the emperors." "You shall die the death of a malefactor, if you persevere in this inclination."* "That is a good inclination which fears God," answered Cyprian, "and therefore must not be changed." "You must then by the will of the princes, be banished." "He is no exile," it was replied, "who has God in his heart, for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." Paternus said, "Before you go, tell me where are your presbyters, who are said to be in this city?" With much presence of mind Cyprian reminded him of the edicts made by the best Roman princes against the practice of informers: "They ought not therefore to be discovered by me, but you may find them, and you yourselves do not approve of men offering themselves voluntarily to you." "I will make you discover them by torments." "By me," the intrepid bishop rejoined, "they shall not be discovered." "Our princes have ordered that christians hold no conventicles, and whoever breaks this rule shall be put to death." "Do what you are ordered," Cyprian calmly replied.

Paternus however was not disposed to hurt Cyprian. Most probably he respected the character of the man, which by this time must have been highly esteemed, through a shining series of good works in Africa. Having made some ineffectual attempts to work on his fears,

* The passion of Cyprian in Pam. Edit. Fleury's Hist. b. 7.

he sent him into banishment to Curubis, a little town fifty miles from Carthage, situate by the sea, over against Sicily. The place was healthy, the air good, and by his own desire he had private lodgings. The citizens of Curubis, during the eleven months which he lived among them, treated him with great kindness, and he was repeatedly visited by christians. Here he served his Divine Master in good works, and Paternus in the interim died.

While he was here he heard that the persecutors had seized nine bishops, with several priests and deacons and a great number of the faithful, even virgins and children, and after beating them with sticks, had sent them to work in the copper-mines in the mountains. Every one of these bishops had been present at the last council of Carthage, and their names were Nemesius, Felix, Lucius, a second Felix, Liteus, Polus, Victor, Jader, and Dativus. I cannot account for the better treatment which Cyprian received from the Roman governors in any other way than by the respect that was paid to his superior quality, labours, and virtues. Be that as it may, Providence favoured him in a peculiar manner. But his sympathizing spirit could not but be with his brethren ; and what he felt, and how he thought, see expressed in a letter to Nemesian and the rest.

“ Your glory required, blessed and beloved brethren, that I ought to come and embrace you, were it not that the confession of the same name has confined me also to this place : but I exhibit myself to you as well as I can, and if it is forbidden me to come to you in body, yet I come in spirit and affection, expressing my soul in letters, how I exult in your honours, reckoning myself a partner with you, though not in suffering, yet in the fellowship of love. How can I hold my peace when I know such glorious things of my dearest brethren, with which the divine appointment hath honoured you ; part of you having already been consummated in martyrdom, who will receive a crown of righteousness from the Lord, and the rest as yet in prisons, or in mines, and bonds, exhibiting by the tediousness of punishment

greater arguments to arm and strengthen the brethren, by the retardation of torments advancing to a higher proficiency in christian glory, and sure to receive in heaven according to their sufferings.

“ In truth, that the Lord has thus honoured you affords me no surprise when I consider the blameless course of your faith in the church, your firm adherence to the divine ordinance, your integrity, concord, humility, diligence, mercy in cherishing the poor, constancy in defence of the truth, and strickness of christian discipline ; and that nothing might be wanting in you as patterns of good works even now in the confession of your voice, and in the sufferings of the body, you stir up the minds of the brethren to divine martyrdom, by exhibiting yourselves as leaders of goodness, so that while the flock follow their pastor and imitate their presidents, they may be crowned in like manner by the Lord. That you have been grievously beaten by clubs, and have been initiated by that punishment in christian confession, is a thing not to be lamented. The body of a christian trembles not on account of clubs, all whose hope is in *wood* * The servant of Christ acknowledges the emblem of his salvation ; redeemed by wood to eternal life, by wood he is advanced to the crown. O feet, embarrassed with fetters indeed, but quickly about to run to Christ in a glorious course ! Let malice and cruelty fetter you as they please, quickly you will come from earth and its sorrows to the kingdom of heaven. In those mines the body is not refreshed by a bed, but Christ is its consolation and rest ; your limbs, fatigued with labours, lie on the ground ; but to lie down with Christ is no punishment. Filth and dirt defile your limbs, void of the cleansing bath ; but you are inwardly washed from all uncleanness. Your allowance of bread is but scanty ; but man doth not live by bread

* I once for all observe, that the want of a just classical taste, in comparison of that of the Augustan age, and the excess of false rhetorical ornaments, every where appear in Cyprian. This was the property not of the man, but of the times, and the meanness of the pun in this place will be forgiven by all who relish the preciousness of the doctrine connected with it.

alone, but by the word of God. You have no proper clothes to fence you from the cold ; but he who has put on Christ is clothed abundantly.”

He afterwards comforts them by suitable arguments, under the loss of means of grace and public worship, and speaks of the Lord as rewarding what he himself hath performed in us. “ For it is of him that we conquer ; it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.” He shews hence the great sin of unbelief in not trusting him who promises his aid to those who confess him, and in not fearing him who threatens eternal punishment to those who deny him. In conclusion he begs their earnest prayers, that he and they may be freed from the snares and darkness of the world ; that those, who in the bond of love and peace had stood together against the injuries of heretics and the pressures of the heathen, might together rejoice in celestial mansions.*

Nemesian and the other bishops returned him an answer full of affection and gratitude, from three different places in which they were confined, in which they acknowledge the pecuniary assistance which Cyprian sent them. He wrote also to Rogatian the younger, and other confessors who were in prison, most probably at Carthage, animating them in his usual manner “ to spurn present punishment through the hope of future joys.” He speaks with much pleasure also of some women and boys who were partners of their sufferings. He recommends to them the example of the elder Rogatian and the ever quiet and sober Felicissimus,† who had consummated their martyrdom already.

In the year 260 Cyprian returning from exile by permission, lived in a garden near Carthage, which was now providentially restored to him, though he had sold it at his first conversion. His liberal spirit would have inclined him once more to sell it for the relief of the needy, had he not feared to attract the envy of the per-

* Epis. 78, 79, 80.

† I suppose he thus distinguishes him from the factious Felicissimus, Epis. 81.

secutors. Here he regulated the affairs of the church, and distributed to the poor what he had left. Here he understood that the persecution, after a little interval, was broken out afresh, and hearing various reports, he sent some to Rome to gain certain information. From these he learnt, what he immediately communicated to the brethren,* that Valerian had given orders that bishops, presbyters, and deacons should be put to death without delay ; that senators, noblemen, and knights should be degraded and deprived of their property, and if they still persisted to be christians, should lose their lives ; that women of quality should be deprived of their property and banished ; that all Cæsar's freedmen who should have confessed, should be stripped of their goods, chained and sent to work on his estates. These were Valerian's orders to the senate, and thus he wrote to the governors of provinces : " These letters we daily expect to arrive, standing in the firmness of faith, in patient expectation of suffering, and hoping from the Lord's help and kindness, the crown of eternal life." He mentions also the news he had heard of the martyrdom of Xistus the bishop of Rome, and the daily ferocity with which the persecution was carried on at Rome in all its horrors. He begs that the intelligence may be circulated through Africa, " That we may all think of death, not more than immortality, and in the fulness of faith may rather rejoice at than fear the event."

Galerius Maximus had succeeded Paternus in the proconsulate, and Cyprian was daily expected to be sent for. In this awful crisis a number of senators and others, considerable for their offices or their quality, came to him. Ancient friendship melted the minds of some of them toward the man, and they offered to conceal him in country places, but his soul was now a-thirst for martyrdom. The uncertainty of tedious banishment could not be agreeable to one, who had had so much experience of this kind ; and Valerian's law being expressly levelled at men of his character, there seemed

* Epis. 82.

little probability of his being long concealed. I believe his generous temper would have been hurt to have endangered any of his old Pagan friends on his account. He might then hesitate to accept their offers, though he would by no means, according to the steady maxims of his conscientious prudence, do any thing to accelerate his own death. Pontius his deacon in his life tells us, in opposition to the intemperate zeal of those who were for giving themselves up to the martyrdom, that he had his fears on this head, but his fears were conscientious, lest he should displease God by throwing away his life. He continued still at Carthage exhorting the faithful, and wishing that when he should suffer martyrdom, death might find him thus employed for his God. However being informed that the proconsul, then at Utica, had sent some soldiers to bring him thither, he was induced to comply for a season with the advice of his friends, to retire to some place of concealment, that he might not suffer at Utica, but if he was called to martyrdom might finish his life among his own people at Carthage; so he states the matter in the last of his letters to the clergy and people. "Here," says he, "in this concealment I wait for the return of the proconsul to Carthage, ready to appear before him, and to say what shall be given me at the hour. Do you, dear brethren, do you agreeably to the discipline you have always received, and to the instructions you have learnt from me, continue still and quiet; let none of you excite any tumult on account of the brethren, or offer himself voluntarily to the Gentiles. He who is seized and delivered up ought to speak; the Lord in us will speak at that hour; and confession rather than profession is our duty."

The proconsul being returned to Carthage, Cyprian returned to his garden; while he was there, two officers with soldiers came to seize him. They carried him in a chariot between them to a place called Sextus, six miles from Carthage, by the sea side, where the proconsul lodged indisposed. The proconsul deferred the affair till the next day, and he was carried back to the

lodgings of the chief of the officers about the distance of a stadium from the prætorium. The news spread through Carthage, his celebrity on account of his good works drew prodigious crowds to the scene, not only of christians, but of infidels, who revered the virtue of the man.

The chief of the officers guarded him, but in a courteous manner ; so that he ate with his friends, and had them about him as usual. The christians passed the night in the street before his lodgings, and the charity of Cyprian moved him to direct a particular attention to be paid to the young women who were among the crowd. The next day the proconsul sent for Cyprian, who went to the prætorium attended by crowds of people. The proconsul not yet appearing, he was ordered to wait for him in a private place, where he sat down. Being in a great perspiration, a soldier, who had been a christian, offered him fresh clothes. " Shall we," says Cyprian, " seek for a remedy for that which may last no longer than to-day."

He was at length brought into the judgment-hall, where the proconsul sat. " Are you Thascius Cyprian?" " I am." " Are you he whom the christians call their bishop?" " I am." " Our princes have ordered you to worship the gods." " That I shall not do." " You will do better to consult your safety, and not despise the gods." " My safety and virtue is Christ the Lord, whom I desire to serve for ever." " I pity your case," says the proconsul, " and could wish to consult for you." " I do not wish," says the prelate, " that things should be otherwise with me, than that adoring my God, I may hasten to him with all the ardour of my soul ; for the afflictions of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." The proconsul now reddening with anger, says, " You have lived sacrilegiously a long time, and have formed into a society men of an impious conspiracy, and have shewn yourself an enemy to the gods and their religion, and have not hearkened to the equitable counsels of our princes, but have ever been a fath-

er of the impious sect, and their ringleader; you shall therefore be an example to the rest, and they shall learn their duty by your blood. Let Thascius Cyprian, who refuses to sacrifice to the gods, be put to death by the sword." "God be praised," said the martyr, and while they were leading him away, a multitude of the people followed and cried, "Let us die with our holy bishop."

A troop of soldiers attended him, and the officers marched on each side of him. They led him into a plain surrounded with trees, and many climbed up to the top of them to see him at a distance. Cyprian took off his mantle, and fell on his knees and worshipped his God; then he put off his inner garment and remained in his shirt. The executioner being come, Cyprian ordered twenty-five golden denarii to be given him; he himself bound the napkin over his eyes, and a presbyter and deacon tied his hands for him, and the christians laid before him napkins and handkerchiefs to receive his blood. Then his head was cut off by the sword.*

His biographer Pontius represents himself as wishing to have died with him, and as divided between the joy of his victorious martyrdom, and sorrow that himself was left behind.

Thus after an eventful and instructive period of about twelve years since his conversion, after a variety of toils and exercises among friends, and open foes and nominal christians, by a death more gentle than commonly fell to the lot of martyrs, rested at length in Jesus the magnanimous and charitable spirit of Cyprian of Carthage. An extraordinary personage surely! But the character will yet deserve a more distinct illustration. Let writers, whose views are secular, celebrate their heroes, their statesmen, and their philosophers; and while a christian taste is derided, let us at least enjoy the rare felicity of these times of civil liberty, in employing the press to do some justice, however deficient our powers may be, to men whom the modern taste seems willing

* Acts of his Martyrdom, Passion of Cyprian in Pam.; Pontius' Life of Cyprian, and Fleury's History.

to assign to contemptuous oblivion. And let their memorial be blessed for ever.

CHAPTER XV.

Cyprian compared with Origen.

THE east and the west beheld at the same time these two men, in talents, activity, and endowments much superior to the rest of the christian world. The Roman seems beyond comparison to have excelled the Grecian in those things in which true christian virtue consists ; yet, as the latter by the fruits of his life claims a just place among saints, though miserably tarnished and clouded, chiefly by his philosophy, it may answer some valuable purpose, not impertinent to the design of this history, to enter into a comparison between them in some particulars.

I. There may have been as pious and holy men as Cyprian in the interval of time between the apostles and him, but we have no opportunity of knowing any other so well. The distinct particularity of the accounts concerning him makes his character remarkably deserving of our attention. The dealings of God with a sinner, at his first conversion, often give a strong tincture to his whole future life. Cyprian was meant for very great and important services of an active nature in the church, attended with an almost uninterrupted series of suffering ; such as no man could perform to the glory of God, but one who knew assuredly the ground on which he stood, by a strong work of the Divine Spirit on his soul. His experience in conversion he describes himself in his letter to Donatus. His reception of christianity was not the effect of mere reasoning or speculation. It was not carried on in a scholastic or philosophical manner, but may truly be said to have been “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” He felt the grace of God, forgiveness of sins by Jesus Christ, the influence of the

Holy Ghost powerful, exuberant, and victorious. His soul was brought into the love of God, and that of the purest kind tempered ever with humility and godly fear ; and it is very evident that he always saw the work to be of God, and had nothing to behold in himself as wise, holy, and glorious ; that a spirit of thankfulness for redeeming love, of simple dependance on the divine promises, and of steady charity to God and man was the result. His race was of no long duration ; about twelve years ; by far the greater part of the time he was bishop of Carthage. He lived a christian life, and no part of that was exempt from much labour or much affliction. He seems never to have known what it was to settle into a lukewarm state. The fire first kindled in him burnt serene and steady to the end of his days. I know that Mosheim charges him with an ambitious, domineering spirit that invaded the rights of the lower clergy and people.* But I know him too well, though an excellent and very judicious secular historian, to trust his account of men of *real holiness*. From the most attentive review I have been able to make of the African prelate, by a repeated perusal of his writings, especially his Epistles, I cannot see any thing on which to ground this censure. He did nothing in general without the clergy and people. He was ever sedulous in promoting the good of the whole. The episcopal character itself, through the gradual growth of superstition, though as yet at no very blameable height in the church, was naturally growing up to an excess of honour, and some few expressions savouring of haughtiness and asperity under particular provocation I have observed in Cyprian. But ambition was not his vice. Candour would rather say he was in general influenced by a very fervent zeal, doubtless supported in its exertions by a temper remarkably active and sanguine. But when I would look for any thing selfish, proud, or domineering in his general conduct, I am struck with the steady tenor of gentleness, charity, and humility.

* Eccles. History, Century 3, ch. 2.

In fine, had he not been a christian, one might have held him forth to the world as a great man ; if it be the part of a great man to unite, in a large and capacious soul, the opposite qualities which so rarely meet in firm consistence in the same subject ; spirit and mildness, magnanimity and mercy, fortitude and prudence, warmth of temper and accuracy of judgment, and particularly zeal and discretion, each in a very high degree.

In Origen's conversion we see nothing remarkable. He received christianity more in a way of education. It is not usual with God to make use of such persons for such extraordinary services, as those who, like Cyprian, in the prime of life have been selected from the world. Origen's views of the peculiar truths of christianity were, to say no more, too faint and general, nor ever sufficiently distinguished from moral and philosophical religion. He bore persecution, when young, with much zeal and honesty ; but he lived many years in peace and prosperity. Sought after by philosophers, esteemed by courts, and honoured by the great ; he lived a scholastic rather than an active life in the church, always fully employed indeed, but more like a scholar than a minister, ever bent on promoting truth and holiness, so far as he knew them, but always leaving one in pain because of the defectiveness of his views. His last scenes are the best and most decisively christian. He suffered persecution with the patience and honesty of a martyr, and proved indeed whose disciple he was on the whole. Mosheim charges him with dishonesty in his arguments against Celsus, and says that any one that has penetration and judgment may discern it.* I have examined this tract, I cannot say by any means with that care with which I have Cyprian's letters, as I do not think it deserves it ; but I have examined it so far as to be induced to dissent from Mosheim. Indeed great honesty of mind was, if I mistake not, a ruling feature of Origen's character. When will modern writers learn to shew any candour toward the ancients

* Mosheim's Eccl. History, Century 3, ch. 3.

and cease to suppose all excellencies to be confined to these later ages ?

After this general review of these two men, and after it has been owned that integrity and fairness of mind were possessed by both in a very great degree, if it be asked wherein lay the superior virtue of Cyprian, I answer, besides what has been said of the difference of their conversions, and above all of the work of God in their hearts all along.

II. Cyprian was possessed of a simplicity to which Origen seems ever to have been a stranger. By simplicity I mean here a genuine and unadulterated taste for the doctrine and spirit of the christian religion, just as it stands in its real nature. It is possible for a person very eminent in this gift, which is purely divine and spiritual, not to know much more of evangelical truth than another far inferior in this respect, because the light and means of information are very different in different ages of the church, and it is evident that the third century suffered a decline in illumination. But where a man is deficient in knowledge, yet if his simplicity of christian taste be very strong, he will be silent on those subjects which he understands not, at least you shall hear hardly any thing opposite to any part of divine truth. This is Cyprian's case. I cannot find, for instance, that he understood the election of grace. Since Justin's days the knowledge of it was departing from the church. But he opposed it not. Origen, less humble and less submissive to divine instruction, and feeling more resources in his reasoning powers, dares to oppose it by an opposite statement of the doctrine.*

In Cyprian this simplicity appears in a supreme degree. He never trifles with scripture, or sets up his reason against it. Void of the whole apparatus of Grecian philosophy, and possessed of what is much better, plain good sense, he takes always the words of scripture in their first, obvious, and most natural meaning, and thinks he has sufficiently proved his point, when

* Philocalia xxi.

he has supported it by an apposite quotation. His spirit bows to the divine word ; and hence faith, patience, charity, heavenly-mindedness have full dominion in his soul. Hence his sentiments have a strength, a purity, a perspicuity peculiarly inherit in those whose religious taste is altogether scriptural. Here it is that he and Origen are opposite, "*toto Cælo.*" The latter is full of platonic notions concerning the soul of the world, the transmigration of spirits, free-will, the pre-existence of souls, and allegorical interpretations without end. The first and simple sense of scripture he too often dares to reject entirely.* David's sin in the affair of Uriah he cannot admit. It seems he had not such strong and palpable proof of his own innate depravity, as to suppose it possible for so good a man to fall so foully. He has recourse therefore to a hidden, abstruse sense. In his numberless comments on scripture, he constantly deals in fanciful allegories, and makes a system of this sort which prevades the whole of the sacred oracles ; and while the just and plain sense is much neglected, he covers the whole with the thick mist of mysticism and chimerical philosophy, and while he labours still to support the faith which was once delivered to the saints, he mixes it with much allegorical trash, after the manner of his platonic master Ammonius, which will not incorporate with christian doctrine. Thus, by accommodating his interpretation to the then reigning literary taste, he gained to himself indeed a celebrity of character among the heathen, even among the great and the noble, but threw all things into inextricable ambiguity. The quickness of his parts and his superior ingenuity hence entangled him only the deeper, and enabled him to move in the chaos of his own formation with an ease and rapidity that rendered him unconscious of the difficulties in which he had involved himself.

One remarkable consequence of this difference of character was, that while Origen could gain the favour

* Philoc. chap. i. p. 20.

of the great among the Pagans, and be heard by them with patience, Cyprian could not be endured in his preaching or writings, but by real christians. And another is this, that while it is no easy thing to vindicate the soundness of the former in christian principles, the latter stands in full perspicuity christian throughout.

Such is the difference between a man of simplicity and a man of philosophy in religion ; and one may on this occasion compare the effect of a philosophical and of a philological spirit. Origen had the former, Cyprian the latter. For eloquence was his forte, and he possessed all the powers of it in a very high degree, according to the taste of his age, which was far from being the best. May it not be said, that grammar, history, criticism, oratory, taught and acquired, with a proper subordination to divine grace, and regulated by common sense, are much less dangerous, and, in their way, more useful endowments for a minister of Christ than philosophy of any kind, metaphysical or natural ? I mean not to exclude these from the education of persons who mean to be pastors, far from it. But this I must say, that a less proportion of *these* and a greater proportion of *those* than what agrees with the present fashionable taste, would be more advantageous to the church. The reasoning powers may find in the former an useful exercise and improvement, without the danger of presumption so strongly adhering to the latter.

III. Having compared the lives and the spirit of the men, let us now view a little the principles of each. Of Cyprian, after the many quotations already given from his writings, little need be added. Nevertheless, as it has lain more in our way to consider him as addressing christians than Pagans or infidels, I shall select a letter of his to Demetrian, a persecutor of christians in Africa, in which his manner of preaching to men, altogether profane and unconverted, is observable.

He denounces to him the plain threatenings of eternal punishment. "There remains hereafter* an eternal

* Pam. ad Demetrian.

prison, constant flame, and perpetual punishment. There the groans of supplicants will not be heard, because here you would not hear the terror of God's indignation." He bids him solemnly look into himself, and appeals to his conscience as affording full proof of his guilt before God. And he aggravates the charge of condemnation, because amidst the miseries of the times men did not repent, and he exposes the unreasonableness of idolatry. After exhibiting in lively colours the all-important scenes of the last judgment, he concludes with this christian exhortation, which is introduced in the true taste and order of things, after he had first denounced the terrors of the law. "Provide then for your security and life, while you may. We offer you the salutary office of our mind and counsel, and because we may not hate you, and we please God more by not requiting evil, we exhort you, while there is time, to please God and to emerge from the profound night of superstition to the fair light of true religion. We envy not your advantages, nor do we hide the divine benefits. We return good will for your hatred, and for the torments and punishments, which are brought upon us, we shew the paths of salvation. Believe and live; and ye who persecute us for a time, rejoice with us for ever. When you depart hence there will be no room for repentance, no method of being reconciled to God, here life is lost or held, here provision is made for eternal salvation by the worship of God and the fruit of faith, and let no man be retarded either by his sins or his years from coming to obtain salvation. No repentance is too late, while a man remains in this world.

"An access lies open to the grace of God, and to those who seek and understand the truth the access is easy. Even in the very exit of life pray for remission of sins, and implore the only living true God with confession and faith. Pardon is granted to him who confesses, and saving grace from the divine goodness is conferred on the believer, and a man may pass to immortality in the very article of death. This grace Christ imparts, this office of his mercy he affords, by subduing death

through the trophy of his cross, by redeeming the believer with the price of his blood, by reconciling man to God the Father, by quickening the dead with celestial regeneration. Him, if it be possible, let us all follow, let us be baptized in his name. He opens to us the way of life, he brings us back to paradise. He leads us to the heavenly kingdom. With him we shall always live. By him made sons of God, with him we shall always exult, recovered by his blood, we shall be christians with Christ in glory, blessed of God the Father, rejoicing ever in his goodness in his sight, and giving him thanks to eternity ; for he cannot but be always grateful, and joyful, who, when he was obnoxious to death, has been made secure of immortality."

With such an affectionate spirit, and with such clearness of doctrine did Cyprian preach justification, by faith only, to the unconverted. It must not be denied, that in his address to men who had already tasted that the Lord is gracious, there is not the same degree of evangelical purity. In his *Opere* and *Eleemosynis* he represents the duty of alms-giving, of which he says very excellent things, in a style that might easily be construed into the language of merit ; and as he had not learnt to distinguish the Apocrypha from the Old Testament, he supports his ideas with quotations from Tobit and Ecclesiasticus. He thinks that the filth we contract after conversion may be washed away by baptism, and has a few other expressions to the same purport. We have had an experience of the evil tendency of such language, which he had not. We know too, from the dependance on divine grace and the Spirit's illumination, which Cyprian and many other fathers of the same stamp had, besides the testimony of their holy lives, that the same expressions mean not with them what they do in the mouths of moderns, full of self-righteousness and contempt both of the grace of Christ and of the work of the Holy Ghost. We are sure that the former mean no opposition to the grace of God, because they are humble ; it is but too evident that the latter do, because they are proud and scorn the whole work of God in the

new birth. It had been well, however, if saints had never given a handle to the profane to adulterate the doctrines of the gospel. But I have before observed that Cyprian's views of grace were not equally clear with those of the first christians. Yet in every fundamental principle he speaks as the oracles of God; in his addresses to Pagans, Christians, or Jews, he is always fervent and zealous. His Tract on Patience, as a practical performance, and that on the Lord's Prayer, as a doctrinal one, deserve the highest praise. To finish here the account of his works, they are excellent in their kind, and he must have a poor taste indeed in godliness who will not find the perusal of them refreshing to his soul. But he shines much more in practical than in speculative divinity. The shortness of his christian life and the weight of his employments will easily account for this.

I wish it were as easy to clear the doctrinal character of Origen from reproach. The ancients themselves were much divided in their views of his opinion concerning the Son of God. It is certain that the Arians of the fourth century seemed to receive some countenance from him, and men who had so very little assistance from precedents, were glad to catch at the shadow of an argument drawn from his illustrious name. Were his arianism indeed full and confessed on all hands, what would it avail as an argument; I say not against the scriptures, but against the joint consent of the whole church for three hundred years? Even the very opposition made against his character, by many, shews how zealous the church had ever been in the defence of the doctrine of the Trinity. I see no profit from entering this wide field. His books against Celsus, in which he ably defends christianity against philosophy and paganism, with his Philocalia, are those alone which I have had opportunity to read, and these want not sufficiently decisive passages, were they not embarrassed by others of a more doubtful cast.

It is certain however that one who thought so rapidly, wrote so much, and had his eyes so steadily on his phi-

osophy, must have dropped many things from his pen, which he would not have said a second time, had he considered them. That he never meant to hold any thing different from the general creed, is certain from the pains he took against heretics, as well as his general character. His erroneous sentences seem then more properly to contain queries and conjectures than settled opinions. Athanasius (and he must be allowed to have been a judge of this matter) believed him to be sound, and quotes him to prove our Lord's co-eternity and co-essentiality with the Father. And he observes that what things he wrote by way of controversy and disputation are not to be looked on as his own words.*

The best defence, after all, of Origen, lies in the general holiness of his life, and patient suffering for the faith of Christ in his old age. And I rejoice that amidst all the trash with which his writings abound, we have yet this unquestionable testimony that he kept the commandments of God, and had the faith of Jesus. The great loss of his works, particularly his very voluminous Commentaries, is not much to be regretted. But there are two sentences† in them which deserve to be quoted at length. He thus speaks on these words, Rom. iii. "we conclude that a man is justified by faith, &c. *the justification of faith only is sufficient, so that if any only believe, he may be justified, though no good work hath been fulfilled by him;*" and again, on the case of the penitent thief, "he was justified by faith without the works of the law; because concerning this the Lord did not inquire what he had before done, neither did he stay to ask what work he would perform after he had believed, but being justified by his confession only, he going to paradise, carried him as a companion along with him."

Thus the precious doctrine of justification, though too much sullied and covered with rubbish, even in the third century, was yet alive in the faith of the most du-

* Cave's Life of Origen.

† See Bishop Beveridge on the Articles of the Church of England.

bious characters among the Ante-nicene fathers. This it was that kept Origen, with all his hay and stubble, firm on christian foundations, and distinguished him radically from an enemy of Christ.

IV. If we compare the public life of these two men, the Grecian shines in scholastic, the Roman in a pastoral capacity. Origen appears as an author, and moves in a sphere calculated for the learned. Cyprian is a preacher, and like the apostles addresses equally all sorts of men. Yet, through the pride of corrupt nature, he was most likely to be attended to by the poor ; refinement of thought he valued not ; to address the heart and conscience, and to reduce every religious consideration to real practice, this was his aim. Yet Origen was usefully employed in untying knotty speculations, in arguing down heresies, and in recommending christianity, or something like christianity, to the learned world. No doubt his labours would be of some use amidst the mischief which the accommodating scheme produced ; but the pastoral labours of Cyprian, as they would not be received at all by prejudiced philosophers, so where they were received, left effects of unadulterated piety, through the divine influence that attended them. As a christian bishop, hardly any age has seen his superior in activity, disinterestedness, steady attention to discipline, equally remote from extremes of negligent remissness and impracticable severity ; a charity and a patience unwearied, and ever consistent. He may safely be recommended as a model to all pastors, and particularly to those of episcopal rank, through christendom. Whoever of them feel a desire to serve God, in the most arduous and the most important of all professions, next after the study of the sacred oracles, may profitably give their days and nights to Cyprian. All his genuine writings, the correspondence with Stephen of Rome, and what relates to the controversy between them excepted, deserve to be studiously perused : his letters most of all ; yet unless a man has himself experienced the new birth unto righteousness, he cannot be expected to relish them much ; if he is re-

generated indeed, it is scarce possible for him not to feel a generous glow of the purest godliness from the reading of them with care and attention. That such bishops were more frequent in Europe is devoutly to be wished. What avails good sense, taste, learning, without christian simplicity, and a heart above the world, its flatteries or its frowns! Whoever would see what christian bishops were once, and still ought to be, let him contemplate the prelate of Carthage.

V. But the chief point of view in which the contrast between these two persons is most striking, is in the consequences and fruits of their labours and their works. Before Cyprian's time Africa appears to have been in no very flourishing state with respect to christianity. Within twelve years he was the instrument of most material service in recovering many apostates, in reforming discipline, and in reviving the essence of godliness. His example was most fragrant among them for ages. The honours paid to his memory demonstrate it. Certain it is, that his diocese, once the scene of Punic greatness, continued long after one of the most precious gardens of christianity, as I shall have abundant occasion to shew in the course of this history, should I be allowed to continue it. But the mischiefs of Origen's taste and spirit in religion were inexpressible. Talents and learning! He who possesses much of them has more abundant need to learn humility and divine caution. If he does not much benefit mankind by them, he is in danger of prejudicing them much. No man, not altogether unsound and hypocritical, ever more hurt the church of Christ than Origen. From the fanciful mode of allegory introduced by him, uncontrouled by scriptural rule and order, arose a vitiated method of commenting on the scriptures, which has been succeeded by a contempt of types and figures altogether, just as his fanciful ideas of letter and spirit tended to remove from men's minds all right conceptions of genuine spirituality. A thick mist for ages pervaded the christian world, supported by his absurd allegorical mode. The learned alone were looked at

as guides implicitly to be followed ; and the vulgar, when the literal sense was hissed off the stage, had nothing to do but to follow the authority of the learned. It was not till the days of Luther and Melancthon that this evil was fairly and successfully opposed.

If I have carried the parallel to a greater length than the just laws of history allow, the importance of the case is my only apology. Let the whole be considered in connexion with two passages of St. Paul : “ I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy, lest your minds be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ ;” and “ hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world ?”



CHAPTER XVI.

Other Particulars of Valerian's Persecution.

IT has been already mentioned that Cyprian heard of the death of Sixtus, bishop of Rome, a little before his own martyrdom. In pursuance of the cruel orders of Valerian, for carrying on the persecution, he had been seized with some of his clergy. While they were carrying him to execution, Laurentius, his chief deacon, followed him weeping, and said, “ Whither goest thou, father, without thy son ?” “ Sixtus said, “ You shall follow me in three days.” We may suppose him to have been possessed with the spirit of prophecy in saying this, because we are certain that miraculous gifts were as yet by no means extinct in the church. But perhaps the declaration was not out of the reach of common sagacity from the circumstances of affairs.

After Sixtus' death* the prefect of Rome, moved by an idle report of the immense riches of the Roman church, sent for Laurentius, and ordered him to deliver them up. Laurentius replied, “ Give me a little time to set every thing in order, and to take an account of each

* Aug. vol. 9, p. 52. See Fleury, b. 7.

particular.” The prefect granted him three days time. In that space Laurentius collected all the poor who were supported by the Roman church, and going to the prefect, said, “Come, behold the riches of our God ; you shall see a large court full of golden vessels.” The prefect followed him, but seeing all the poor people he turned to Laurentius with looks full of anger. “What are you displeased at ?” said the martyr ; “the gold you so eagerly desire is but a vile metal taken out of the earth, and serves as an incitement to all sorts of crimes ; the true gold is that Light whose disciples these poor men are. The misery of their bodies is an advantage to their souls, sin is the true disease ; the great ones of the earth are the truly poor and contemptible. These are the treasures which I promised you, to which I will add precious stones. Behold these virgins and widows ; they are the church’s crown ; make use of these riches for the advantage of Rome, of the emperor, and yourself.”

Doubtless had the prefect’s mind been at all disposed to receive an instructive lesson, he had met with one here. The liberality of christians in maintaining a great number of objects, and looking for no recompense but that which shall take place at the resurrection of the just, while they patiently bore affliction, and humbly rested on an unseen Saviour, was perfectly agreeable to the mind of him who bids his disciples in a well-known parable to relieve those who cannot recompense them.* How glorious the scene, at a time that the rest of the world were tearing one another in pieces, and philosophers aided not the miseries of men in the least ! But as the persecutors would not hear the doctrines explained, so neither would they see the precepts exemplified, with patience. “Do you mock me ?” cries the prefect ; “I know you value yourselves for contemning death, and therefore you shall not die at once.” Then he caused him to be stripped, extended, and fastened to a gridiron, and in that manner to be broiled to death by

* Luke xiv. 12—15.

a slow fire. When he had continued a considerable time on one side, he said to the prefect, "Let me be turned, I am sufficiently broiled on one side." And when they had turned him he said, "It is enough, ye may eat." Then looking up to heaven, he prayed for the conversion of Rome, and gave up the ghost !

I give this story at some length, because it has sufficient marks of credibility, and is supported by the evidence of Augustine. I cannot go on with Fleury in various other stories. He seems ready to believe every thing, Gibbon to believe nothing, in subjects of martyrology. Whatever judgment they may be possessed of, it remains in both equally unexercised ; indiscriminate incredulity being as blind a thing as indiscriminate belief. It is the duty of a reasonable creature to discern and to distinguish ; this requires labour and judgment. Fleury's method needs only the former, Gibbon's neither the one nor the other. Where I believe not, I say nothing ; where I believe, I relate, and endeavour, as well as I can, neither to impose on my readers nor on myself.

The two following stories carry with them every internal mark of credibility. The one illustrates well that scripture, "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast ordained strength;" and the other another scripture, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.*

At Cæsarea in Cappadocia a child named Cyril shewed uncommon fortitude. He called on the name of Jesus Christ continually, nor could threats or blows prevent him from owning christianity. Many children of his own age persecuted him ; and his own father drove him out of his house, with the applauses of many for his zeal in the support of paganism. The judge ordered him to be brought before him, and said, "My child, I will pardon your faults, your father shall receive you again ; it is in your power to enjoy your father's estate, provided you are wise, and take care of your own interest." "I rejoice to bear your

* See Fleury, b. 7. Act sincera, 253, 244.

reproaches," replied the child, "God will receive me; I am glad that I am expelled out of our house; I shall have a better mansion; I fear not death, because it will introduce me into a better life." Divine grace having enabled him to witness this good confession, he was ordered to be bound and led as it were to execution. The judge had given secret orders to bring him back again, hoping that the sight of the fire might overcome his resolution. Cyril remained inflexible. The humanity of the judge induced him still to continue his remonstrances. "Your fire and your sword," says the young martyr, "are insignificant. I go to a better house and more excellent riches; despatch me presently, that I may enjoy them." The spectators wept through compassion. "You should rather rejoice," says he, "in conducting me to my punishment. You know not what a city I am going to inhabit, nor what is my hope." Thus he went to his death, and was the admiration of the whole city.

There was at Antioch a presbyter named Sapricius, and a layman called Nicephorus, who, through some misunderstanding, after a remarkable intimacy, became quite estranged from one another, and would not even salute in the street. Nicephorus after a time relented, begged for forgiveness of his fault, and took repeated measures to procure a reconciliation, but in vain. He even ran to the house of Sapricius, and throwing himself at his feet, entreated his forgiveness for the Lord's sake; the presbyter continued obstinate.

In this situation of things the persecution of Valerian reached them suddenly, and Sapricius was carried before the governor and was ordered to sacrifice on the command of the emperors. "We christians," replied Sapricius, "acknowledge for our King Jesus Christ, who is the true God, creator of heaven and earth. Let idols perish who can do neither good nor hurt." The prefect tormented him a long time, and then ordered him to be beheaded. Nicephorus hearing of this, runs up to him, as he is leading to execution, and renews, in vain, the same supplications. The executioners de-

ride his humility as perfect folly. But he perseveres, and attends Sapricius to the place of execution. There he says further, "Ask and it shall be given you, and soon." But not even the mention of the word of God itself, so suitable to Sapricius' own circumstances, could move his spirit.

Sapricius, suddenly forsaken of God, recants, and promises to sacrifice. Nicephorus, amazed, exhorts him to the contrary, but in vain. He then speaks to the executioners, "I believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ whom he hath renounced." The officers return to give an account to the governor, who ordered Nicephorus to be beheaded.

The account ends here: but if Sapricius lived to repent, as I hope he did, he might see what a thing it is for a miserable mortal, whose sufficiency rests entirely on divine grace, to despise, condemn, or exult over his brother. The last became the first, and God shewed his people wonderfully by this case, that he will support them in their sufferings for his name; but at the same time will have them to be humble, meek, and forgiving. This is the first instance I have seen of a man attempting to suffer for Christ on philosophical grounds, and it failed. Let christians and men of self-sufficiency be ever thus kept asunder, and let both their cause and their spirit be preserved distinct and separate.

It appears that christian fortitude is a very different thing from the pride of philosophy, or the sullenness of Indians, and cannot even subsist in the absence of christian meekness and charity. Philosophers and savages can maintain the hardy spirit of nature amidst the highest gratifications of malice and ferocity. The spirit of suffering for Christ being above nature, and wrought in the heart by the grace of Christ, cannot subsist, if the Spirit of God be provoked to leave the sufferer, and the event of this story shews how little reason infidels have to plume themselves on the hardness of others, who have suffered, besides christians. Their spirit is of a quite different nature.

Dionysius of Alexandria, whom divine Providence had so remarkably preserved in the Decian persecution, lived to suffer much also in this, but not to death. Eusebius has preserved some extracts of his writings, which not only inform us of this, but also throw some considerable light on the effects of this persecution in Egypt.*

He was brought before Æmilian the prefect, with the presbyter Maximus, and three of his deacons, Faustus, Eusebius, and Chæremon, and a certain Roman christian. Æmilian ordered the bishop to recant, observing that his so doing might have a good influence on others. It was answered, "We ought to obey God rather than man; I worship God who alone ought to be worshipped." "Hear the clemency of the emperor," says Æmilian: "You are all pardoned, provided you return to a natural duty, adore the gods who guard the empire, and forsake those things which are contrary to nature." Dionysius answered, "All men do not worship all gods, but men worship variously according to their sentiments. But we worship the ONE GOD the maker of all things, who gave the empire to the most clement emperors Valerian and Gallienus, to whom we pour out incessant prayers for their prosperous administration." "What can be the meaning," says Æmilian, "why you may not still adore that God of yours (supposing him to be a God) in conjunction with our gods?" Dionysius answered, "We worship no other God."

From this remarkable question of the prefect, it is evident that men might have been tolerated in the worship of Jesus, if they had allowed idolaters also to be right in the main, by associating idols with the true God. The firmness of christians, in this respect, provoked their enemies. The quarrel is the same at this day against real christians; they must be condemned as bigots, because they cannot allow the world to be right in the eyes of God.

* Book 7, chap. 10.

Æmilian banished them to a village near the desert called Cephro. And thither Dionysius, though sickly, was constrained to depart immediately. "And truly," says Dionysius, "we are not absent from the church," (meaning, I suppose, his own church at Alexandria) "for I still gather such as are in the city as if I were present ; absent indeed in body, but present in spirit. And there continued with us in Cephro a great congregation, partly of the brethren which followed us from the city (Alexandria) and partly of them which came from Egypt. And there God opened a door to me to speak his word. Yet at the beginning we suffered persecution and stoning, but at length not a few of the Pagans forsook their idols and were converted. For here we had an opportunity to preach the word of God to a people who had never heard before. And as God had brought us among them, after our ministry was there completed, he removed us to another place. I hearing that Æmilian had ordered that we should depart from Cephro, and not knowing the place whither we were to go, yet took my journey cheerfully. Understanding that Colluthio was the place, I felt much distress. It was reported to be destitute of all the comforts of society, infested by thieves, and exposed to the tumults of travellers. My companions know well the effect this had on my mind. I proclaim my own share ; at first I grieved immoderately. It was a consolation however that it was nigh to a city. I was in hopes from the nearness of the city, that we might enjoy the company of dear brethren, and that particular assemblies for divine worship might be established in the suburbs, which indeed came to pass."

Amidst this scantiness of information, and conveyed in no great perspicuity or beauty of style, as far as appears from the slight specimens we have of Dionysius, it appears that the Lord was with him, and made his sufferings to tend to the furtherance of the gospel. His confession of his own heaviness of mind does honour to his ingenuousness, and the strength of Christ was made perfect in his weakness.

In another Epistle he gives a brief account of the sufferings of others ; it deserves to be transcribed as a monument of the greatness and violence of Valerian's persecution.

“It may seem superfluous to recite the names of our people ; for they were many, and to me unknown. Take this however for certain : There were men and women, young men and old men, virgins and old women, soldiers and vulgar persons, of all sorts and ages. Some after stripes and fire were crowned victors, some after the sword, some others sufficiently tried in a small time, were acceptable sacrifices to the Lord. You all heard how I, and Caius, and Faustus, and Peter, and Paul, when we were led bound by the centurion and his soldiers, were seized by certain men of Mareoto, and drawn away by violence, against our wills. And I, and Caius, and Peter, alone deprived of the other brethren, were shut up in a desert and dreary part of Lybia, distant three days journey from Parætonium, in the desert and dreary country.” I suppose the rest of the company were rescued by the mob. Afterwards he says, “In the city there hid themselves some who visited the brethren secretly : of the ministers, Maximus, Dioscorus, Demetrius, Lucius. For two others of greater note, Faustinus and Aquila, now wander, I know not where, in Egypt. And of the deacons, the rest dying of diseases, there remained alive Faustus, Eusebius, and Chæremon. God strengthened and instructed Eusebius from the beginning to minister diligently to the confessors in prison, and to bury the bodies of the holy martyrs, not without great danger. The president to this day ceases not cruelly to slay some that are brought forth, to tear in pieces others by torments, to consume others more slowly by bonds and imprisonments, commanding that none come nigh them, and inquiring daily if any such persons appear. Yet God still refreshes the afflicted with consolation and the attendance of the brethren.”

This Eusebius, here honourably mentioned, was some time after bishop of Laodicea in Syria, and Maximus

the presbyter was successor to Dionysius in Alexandria. And Faustus was reserved to the days of Dioclesian again to suffer, even to blood.

At Cæsarea in Palestine three persons were devoured by wild beasts, Priscus, Malcus, and Alexander. These persons led an obscure life in the country ; but hearing of the multitude of executions, they blamed themselves for their sloth, came to Cæsarea, went to the judge, and obtained the object of their ambition. A woman, inclined to the heresy of Marcion, of the same city, suffered likewise. Cyprian of Carthage, and above all our Divine Master, condemned the too forward zeal of the former, which yet was, it is hoped, not without the real love of his name ; and Marcion's heresy might more nominally than really cleave to the latter.

After three years employed in persecution, Valerian was taken prisoner by Sapor king of Persia, who detained him the rest of his life, and made use of his neck when he mounted his horse, and at length had him flead and salted. This event belongs to secular rather than church history. But as it is perfectly well attested, and no one that I know of, but Mr. Gibbon, ever affected to disbelieve it, it cannot but strike the mind of any one who fears God. Valerian had known and respected the christians : his persecution must have been a sin against the light, and it is common with divine providence to punish such in a very exemplary manner.

The church was restored to rest after Valerian's captivity. About the year 262 Gallienus his son and successor, in other respects no reputable emperor, proved a sincere friend to the christians, stopped the persecution by edicts, and had the condescension to give the bishops his letters of licence to return to their pastoral charges. Here follows one of them preserved by Eusebius. "The emperor Cæsar Gallienus to Dionysius, (I suppose the bishop of Alexandria then in exile) Pinna, Demetrius, with the rest of the bishops. The benefit of our favour we command to be published through the world, and I have therefore ordered every one to withdraw from such places as are devoted to re-

ligious uses ; so that you may make use of the authority of my edict against any molestation ; and I have some time since granted what you may now freely enjoy ; wherefore Cyrenius the governor of the province will observe the rescript which I have sent." He directed also another edict to other bishops, by which he restored to them the places in which they buried their dead.

Were it needful at this day to refute the rash calumnies of Tacitus and others against the christians, one might appeal to these two edicts of Gallienus. It is impossible that either of them could have taken place, had it not been undeniable that the christians, even to the time beyond the middle of the third century, were men of probity and worthy the protection of government. As it is impossible to avoid this conclusion, the deepest stain rests on the characters of Trajan, Decius, and Valerian, men highly respected in secular history, for treating with savage ferocity subjects of the best characters. But God, who has the hearts of all men in his hand, provided a protector for them in Gallienus, after an unexampled course of heavy persecution for the three last reigns. Gallienus himself seems to have been more like a modern than an ancient sovereign, a man of taste, indolence, and philosophy ; disposed to cherish every thing that looked like knowledge and liberty of thinking ; by no means so kind and generous in his constant practice as his profession might seem to promise ; the slave of his passions, and led away by every sudden feeling that seized his imagination, yet too philosophical to persecute. And christians, as a set of new philosophers, found a complete toleration under a prince whose conscience seems to have set him free from the influence of any religion.

CHAPTER XVII.

From the Reign of Gallienus to the end of the Century.

THE general history of the church of Christ for the remaining forty years affords no great quantity of materials. After having collected them into this chapter in order, it may be proper to reserve, to a distinct consideration, the lives of some particular persons, and other matters which belong not to the thread of history.

We behold now a new scene ; christians legally tolerated under a Pagan government for forty years. The example of Gallienus was followed by the successive emperors to the end of the century, violated only in one instance, the effect of which was presently dissipated by the hand of Providence. This is not a scene for the growth of grace and holiness ; in no time since the apostles was there ever so great a decay ; nor can we shew much of any very lively christianity in all this period.

Those are however ill informed in the nature of things, who suppose that there was literally no persecution all this time. Christians are never, in the best times, without their share of it ; nor is it in the power of the best governments to protect men of godliness from the malice of the world in all cases. We saw an instance of this in the reign of Commodus ; see another under the reign of Gallienus. At Cæsarea in Palestine there was one Marinus a soldier of great bravery, of noble family, and very opulent. The office of centurion being vacant, Marinus was called to it. Another soldier came before the tribunal, and said that by the laws Marinus was incapacitated, because he was a christian and did not do sacrifice to the emperors ; but that he himself, as next in rank, ought to have it. Achæus the governor asked Marinus what was his religion ; on which he confessed himself a christian. The governor gave him three hours space to deliberate. Upon this Theotecnes, bishop of Cæsarea, calls Marinus from the tribunal, takes

him by the hand, and leads him to the church, shews him the sword that hung by his side, and a New Testament which he pulled out of his pocket, and bids him choose which of the two he liked best. Marinus stretching out his right hand, takes up the Holy Scripture. "Hold fast then," said Theotecnes, "cleave to God, and what you have chosen you shall enjoy, being strengthened by him, and depart in peace." After he had returned thence he was by the crier's voice ordered to appear again at the bar, the time of three hours being expired. There he manfully confessed the faith of Christ, heard the sentence of condemnation, and was beheaded.

Without more acquaintance with the particular* institutes of Roman law on this subject, it is not easy to reconcile this proceeding with the edict of Gallienus. Perhaps the act of Achæus was illegal, or some particular military law might stand against the martyr. The fact however rests on the best authority, and the profession of arms had still those among them who loved Jesus, since the days of Cornelius.

The greatest luminary in the church at this time was Dionysius of Alexandria. His works are lost; but a few extracts of them preserved by Eusebius have been given, and some few more may here be introduced. Speaking of the Sabelian heresy, which had now made its appearance, he says :

† "As many brethren have sent their books and disputations in writing to me concerning the impious doctrine lately sown at Pentapolis in Ptolemais, containing many blasphemies against the Almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and also much infidelity concerning his only begotten Son, the *first begotten of every creature*, and the word incarnate, and also senseless ignorance of the Holy Ghost, some of them I have transcribed and sent the copies to you."

This is the first account of the origin of Sabelianism, a plausible corruption, no doubt, perhaps the most so of all those which oppose the mystery of the Trinity.

* Euseb. b. 7. c. 14.

† Book 7, chap. 5.

But like all the rest it fails for want of scripture evidence, and shews itself only to be a weak attempt to lower to human reason, what was never meant to be amenable to its tribunal. The careful distinctions of Dionysius, in recounting the persons of the Trinity, were very proper in speaking of an heresy, which confounds the persons, and leaves them nothing of those distinct characters on which the nature of the gospel so much depends.

This bishop also delivers his sentiments in the controversy concerning the re-baptizing of heretics against the practice, and he condemns with great severity the Novatian schism, because, says he, "it charges the most loving and merciful God with unmercifulness."* Yet in the former subject he confesses himself staggered, for the present at least, in his opinion by a certain fact. "When the brethren were gathered together, a certain person allowed to be sound in the faith, an ancient minister of the clergy, before my time, being present when some were baptized, and hearing the interrogatories and responses, came to me weeping and wailing, and falling prostrate at my feet, protested that the baptism which he had received being heretical, could not be the true baptism, and had no agreement with that which was in use among us, being full of impiety and blasphemy. He owned that the distress of his conscience was extreme, that he durst not presume to lift up his eyes to God, because he had been baptized with profane words and rites. He begged therefore to be baptized, which I durst not do, but told him that frequent communion many times administered might suffice him. When he had heard thanksgiving sounded in the church, and had sung to it Amen; when he had been present at the Lord's table, and had stretched forth his hand to receive the holy food, and had communicated, and of a long time had been partaker of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, I durst not re-baptise him, but bade him be of good cheer and of a sure faith, and

* Book 7, chap. 7.

boldly approach to the communion of saints. Notwithstanding all this, the man mourneth continually, his horror keeps him from the Lord's table, and he scarce with much intreaty can join in the prayers of the church."

We have no farther account of this matter. The man was one of those whom there is all reason to believe the God of grace would in due time relieve. The detestation of heresy, and the marked distinction of true christianity from it, were as yet in some circumstances carried into an extreme. Discipline was hitherto not neglected in the church: On the whole, it was, as I have observed, excessive even to superstition. Satan's temptations are ever ready to drive into despair truly penitent and contrite spirits. The whole story breathes a spirit the very antipode to the licentious boldness of our times, and marks the peculiar character of the piety of the age of Dionysius, sincere, but mixt with superstition.*

The celebration of the feast of Easter and of other holy days forms the subject of another of his Epistles. It will suffice just to have mentioned this.

Dionysius had now returned from exile to Alexandria, and found it involved in the horrors of a civil war. On the feast of Easter, as if he was still in banishment, he wrote to his people, who were in another part of the city, with which he could have no intercourse. Writing to Hierax an Egyptian bishop at some distance, he says, "It is not to be wondered at, that it is difficult for me to converse by Epistles with those at a distance, when I find myself here precluded from having any intercourse with my own bowels. I am constrained to *write* to them, though citizens of the same church, and how my writings may be conveyed to them seems difficult. A man may more easily travel from east to west than from Alexandria to Alexandria. The middle road of this city is more impassable than that vast wilderness which the Israelites wandered through in two generations." He goes on to describe the miseries of war and bloodshed,

* Euseb. b. 7, c. 8. See Greek.

of plagues and diseases, with which Alexandria at that time abounded, and complains that the people still repented not of their sins."

Writing to the brethren, he says, "Now every thing is full of lamentations, every one does nothing but mourn and howl through the city, because of the multitude of corpses and the daily deaths. Many of our brethren, because of their great love and brotherly charity, sparing not themselves, cleaved one to another, visited the sick without fear or caution, and attended upon them diligently ; and in doing these things they lost their own lives, by catching the infection, and voluntarily transferred the sorrows of others upon themselves. In this manner the best of our brethren departed this life, of whom some were presbyters, some deacons, highly revered by the common people." He then goes on to observe with what care and affection the christians attended the funerals of their friends, while the Pagans in the same city, through fear of catching the infection, deserted and neglected theirs. Undoubtedly he describes here a strong picture of the charity of christians, and of the selfishness of other men. It belongs to the true christianity to produce such fruits, though in some respects they might be carried farther than real christian prudence would vindicate. But every lover of Jesus is refreshed to find the certain marks of his spirit and presence among his people.

There was one Nepos, an Egyptian bishop, who taught that the Millennium was to commence after the resurrection, and described the happiness of saints as much consisting in corporeal enjoyments. Dionysius thought the notion dangerous, yet his candour inclined him to entertain a good opinion of Nepos on the whole. He commends his faith, his diligence, his skill in Holy Scripture, and his agreeable psalmody, with which many of the brethren were delighted. As however he thought his opinions dangerous, he opposed them. When he was at Arsenoita he spent three days with the brethren infected with the views of Nepos, and explained the subjects. He speaks with much commendation of the

candour and docility of the people, particularly of Coracion their leader, who owned himself brought over to the sentiments of Dionysius. The authority of Dionysius seems to have quashed the opinions of Nepos in the bud. The consequence of an injudicious and unscriptural view of the Millennium, rejected and refuted by a bishop of candour, judgment, and authority, was, that the doctrine itself continued for ages much out of repute. The learned reader need not be told with how much clearer light the doctrine has been revived and confirmed in our days.

Dionysius finding how much use had been made of the Revelation of St. John in support of the doctrine of the Millennium, gives his thoughts on the book, confessing with much modesty his ignorance of its scope, owning that he did not understand, though he revered it.

The subtilty and restless spirit of those who corrupted the doctrine of the Trinity have ever had this advantage, that while they without fear or scruple could say what they please, its defenders are reduced to the necessity either of leaving the field to them entirely, or of exposing themselves to the specious charge of human inventions, or even of some heresy opposite to that which they are opposing. This last was the case of Dionysius on account of his opposition to Sabellianism. The scantiness of our ideas, and the extreme difficulty of clothing with proper expressions those very inadequate ones which we have on a subject so profound, naturally expose us to this charge, from which yet the charitable zeal of those who see through the designs of heretics, and who love truth, mixt with some necessary confusion, above error, though it wear the garb of simplicity, will not be disposed to shrink on a proper occasion. Sabellius had taken pains to confound the persons of the Father and the Son. Dionysius shewed, by unequivocal testimony, that the Father was not the same as the Son, nor the Son the same as the Father. Dionysius, bishop of Rome, being informed of these things, assembled a council, in which the doctrine attributed

to his name-sake of Alexandria was disapproved, and wrote to him with a view to give him an opportunity of explaining himself.

The bishop of Alexandria with great clearness, candour, and moderation, explained himself at large in a work which he entitled a Refutation and Apology.* In the small remains of this work it appears, that he held the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, and he described the Trinity in Unity, equally steering clear of the rock of Sabellianism, which confounds the persons, and that of Arianism, which divides the substance. And it appears that his testimony may be added to that of the primitive fathers all along on this subject.

“The Father, says he, cannot be separated from the Son, as he is the Father; for that name at the same time establishes the relation. Neither can the Son be separated from the Father; for the word Father implies the union; and the Spirit is in their hands, because it cannot exist without him who sends it to him who bears it. Thus we understand the indivisible Unity of the Trinity; and we comprehend the Trinity in the Unity without any diminution.” This account was satisfactory to the whole church, and was allowed to contain the sense of christians on the doctrine.

In the year 264 the heresy of Paul of Samosata began to be famous, and a degeneracy both in principle and practice, hitherto very uncommon within the pale of christianity, attracted the notice of all who wished well to the souls of men. Paul was the bishop of Antioch: it gives one no very high idea of the state of ecclesiastical discipline in that renowned church, that such a man should ever have been placed at its head at all. But it is no new thing for even sincere christians to be dazzled with the parts and eloquence of corrupt men. The ideas of this man seem to have been perfectly secular, and Zenobia of Palmyra, who at that time styled herself queen of the east, and reigned over a large part of the empire, which had been torn from the indolent

* Athan. de Sent. See Fleury, L. iv. b. 7.

hands of Gallienus, desired his instructions in christianity.* It does not appear that her motives had any thing in them beyond philosophical curiosity. The master and the scholar were well suited to each other, and Paul taught her his own conceptions of Jesus Christ, that he was by nature a common man as we are. The disorders of his life and the heterodoxy of his doctrine could no longer be endured. There is in fact more necessary connexion between these two than the world is ready to believe ; because holiness can only be the effect of christian truth. The bishops met at Antioch to consider his case ; among these particularly Firmilian of Cæsarea in Cappadocia, Gregory† Thaumaturgus, and Athenodorus, who were brethren and bishops in Pontus, and Theotecnes of Cæsarea in Palestine. A number of ministers and deacons besides met together on the occasion. In several sessions the case of Paul was argued. Firmilian seems to have presided, and Paul was induced to recant, and gave such appearances of sincerity that Firmilian and the council believed him. The matter slept therefore for the present, and Paul continued in his bishopric.

It was in this year 264, and the twelfth of Gallienus, that Dionysius of Alexandria died, after having held the See seventeen years. He had been invited to the council ; but pleaded in excuse his great age and infirmities : he however sent a letter to the council containing his advice, and addressed the church of Antioch without taking any notice of her bishop. This was the last service paid by this great and good man to the church of Christ, after having gone through a variety of hardships, and distinguished himself by his steady piety in the cause of Christ. His having been a pupil of Origen in his younger years was no great advantage to his theological knowledge ; but there are in him the strongest marks of unquestionable good sense and moderation, as well as of genuine piety, and it is to be

* Athan. tom. 11. p. 857. Fleury, Euseb. vii. c. 6, &c.

† See his life in chap. below.

regretted that our materials concerning him are so defective.

Gallienus having reigned fifteen years, Claudius succeeded, and after a reign of two years, in which he continued the protector of christians, Aurelian became emperor. Under him a second council was convened concerning Paul of Samosata. His dissimulation was apparent, and the same intolerable corruption appearing both in his doctrine and in his morals, it behoved the friends of Christ to shew that all regard for his person and precepts was not lost in the christian world.* Seventy bishops appeared at the synod, among whom Theotecnus of Cæsarea in Palestine was still one of the principal. They waited some time for the arrival of Firmilian of Cappadocia, who had been invited, and was on his way notwithstanding his great age; but he died at Tarsus in the year 269. He had been one of the greatest luminaries of the day, and so had Gregory Thaumaturgus of Pontus, who died in the interval between the first and second council. It was not in the power of every one, who really believed and loved the truth as it is in Jesus, to confute and expose in a proper manner the artifices of Paul.

Whoever has seen the pains taken at this day by men of Paul's persuasion, to cover their ideas under a cloud of ambiguous expressions, and to represent themselves, when attacked, as meaning the same thing with real christians, while at other times they take all possible pains to undermine the very fundamental doctrines of the gospel, will not be surprised that Paul, artful, eloquent, and deceitful as he was, should be able to give a specious colour to his ideas. But there was one Malchion a presbyter in the council, who added to the soundness of christian faith great skill in the art of reasoning, having been a long time governor of the school of humanity at Antioch. His talents were of service on this occasion; his disputation against Paul was preserved in writing to the time of Eusebius; and he so

* Athan. de Syn. Euseb. 28, &c.

pressed the ambiguous Paul, that he made him to declare himself and shew what he really was. There needed no more to condemn him. All the bishops agreed to his deposition and exclusion from the christian church.

No fact in church history is more certain than this, and the demonstration is clear from thence, that Socinianism in the year 269 was not suffered to exist within the pale of the christian church. I use that term, because it is now well understood, and it fairly expresses the ideas of Paul. In truth, no injury was done to the man: he had certainly no more right to christian preferment than a traitor has to hold any office in any government; and to oblige him to speak out what he really held, was no more than what justice required. Truth and openness are essential to the character of all teachers; he who is void of them deserves to be without scholars or hearers. At the same time I cannot help seeing, that the doctrine usually called Trinitarian was universal in the church in these times. Dionysius, Firmilian, Gregory, Theotecnus, seventy bishops, the whole christian world were unanimous in it, and this unanimity may fairly be traced upward to the apostles.

Paul being deposed, and a new bishop being chosen in his room, an Epistle was written by the council to Dionysius of Rome and Maximus of Alexandria, and sent abroad through the Roman world, in which they explained their own labour in this business, the perverse duplicity of Paul, and the objections against him. The chief part of this from Eusebius will deserve to be transcribed as the fairest account of the business.*

“To Dionysius and Maximus, and all our fellow bishops, elders, and deacons throughout the world, and to the whole universal church, Helenus, Hymonæus, Theophilus, Theotecnus, &c. with all the other bishops who with us inhabit the neighbouring cities and preside over the nations, together with the presby-

* Book 7, chap. 29.

ters and deacons and holy churches of God, to the beloved brethren in the Lord send greeting :

“ We have called many bishops from far to heal this deadly and poisonous doctrine, as Dionysius at Alexandria, and Firmilian of Cæsarea in Cappadocia, men blessed in the Lord, one of whom writing hither to Antioch vouchsafed not once to salute the author of error ; for he wrote not to his person, but to the whole congregation, the copy of which we have annexed. But Firmilian came twice and condemned this strange doctrine. The second time he came as far as Tarsus ; but while we assemble, while we summon him, and wait for his coming, he departed this life. At the first he was poor and had no inheritance derived from his parents, or acquired by any regular profession ; yet is the man grown excessively rich by sacrilege, extortion, and iniquity : he deceived the brethren by his pretended patronage, imposed on their easiness, obliged them to make him presents to be delivered from him, and thus he turned godliness into gain. He was full of vanity, and fond of secular dignities, and would rather be called Ducenarius * than bishop. He has been used to walk in a pompous manner through the streets, reading letters, and inditing publicly, maintaining about him a great troop to guard his person, and much scandal has accrued to the faith from his conduct. In church assemblies he used theatrical artifices to strike the imagination and procure applause to himself by surprising the simple. He constructed for himself a tribunal and throne set on high, not as became a disciple of Jesus Christ ; and he had a private closet like the secular magistrates, to which he gave the same name. When he harangued the people, he struck his hand upon his thigh, and his feet upon his tribunal. If any did not applaud him, as is usual in the theatre, by clapping their hands and shaking their handkerchiefs, who did not cry out and rise up, the usual custom of his partizans, he expressed his displeasure, reproving and reviling those

* An officer of the revenue ; he probably held this office under Zenobia.

who, sensible that they were in the house of God, behaved with decency and sobriety. The deceased expositors of holy scripture he openly inveighed against, like a sophist and impostor extolling himself. The hymns made in honour of Jesus Christ he suppressed, as the composition of modern authors ; and ordered others to be sung by women in his own praise in the church on Easterday, which caused horror in the hearers ; and he encouraged, as far as in him lay, similar practices in the neighbouring bishops. He refused to acknowledge the Son of God to have come down from heaven. Nor shall this be barely asserted, but proved out of the commentaries published by us to the world, especially where he saith that Christ Jesus is of the earth. Yet his admirers affirm him to be an angel come down from heaven,* to which flatteries he gives all possible encouragement. He has women, his private associates, as they are called at Antioch. His priests and deacons have the same. Their crimes have been proved, but he conceals them, and prevents them from accusing himself. He even enriches them to engage them the more strongly to his interests. We know, dear brethren, that the bishop and all the clergy ought to give the people an example of all good works ; and we are not ignorant how many have fallen by indulging this evil custom of keeping private women, and many again are subject to suspicion and slander. Admitting therefore that he hath committed no actual crime, he ought at least to be afraid of the suspicion arising from such a conduct, for fear of giving offence or a bad example to any. For how can he reprove another, or warn him not to converse with a woman for fear of stumbling, as it is written, he who hath already divorced one woman, and keeps two with him, both handsome and in the flower of their age, and whom he carries about wherever he goes, at the same time living in a delicate and luxurious manner. All sigh for these things in secret indigna-

* The language of Paul's parasites, which candour requires to be understood not literally but metaphorically. Even so it tells sufficiently to his discredit.

tion, but tremble at his power, and dare not accuse him. Severe censures would doubtless be due to him, were he our dearest friend, and perfectly orthodox in his sentiments. But he who hath renounced christian mysteries lies out of the reach of our censures.

“Necessity constraining us, we have expelled from the church the adversary of God, and placed in his room Domnus, a man adorned with all gifts required in a bishop, son of Demetrian of worthy memory, the predecessor of Paul.”

It is fashionable, at present, to despise all religious councils whatever ; I suppose because it is fashionable to despise religion. For on all subjects, which are esteemed of moment, common sense hath ever dictated to mankind to hold councils ; and politics, agriculture, and the fine arts have their councils continually. Not to be carried away by the torrent of the times I think to be an historian’s duty. Men who follow fashion will gain the reputation of being sensible and judicious, without either learning, industry, or reflection. This makes the temptation so strong. I shall venture however to affirm, that all religious councils are not foolish, because many have been so. That at Jerusalem* was worth more than all the wealth and power of the Roman empire ; in this way also we have seen Cyprian to have served the church substantially, though in one instance he failed : and the council which dictated the letter concerning Paul will deserve, under God, the thanks of the church of Christ to the end of the world. Circumstanced as Paul was, superior in artifice, eloquence, and capacity, supported by civil power and uncontrolled in his own diocese, nothing seemed so likely to weaken his influence and encourage the true disciples of Christ, as the concurrent testimony of the christian world assembled against him. And though it may be difficult for the softness of skeptical politeness to relish the blunt tone of the council, there seem to me evident marks of the fear of God, christian gravity, and conscientious re-

* See Acts of the Apostles.

gard to the truth in their proceedings. Common, no doubt, must rumours have been of Paul's actual lewdness in Antioch ! But for want of specific proof the council check themselves, and assert no more than what they know. True, they did no more than they ought; but had they been overheated with malice they would have exaggerated. It is grievous to see this first instance of a christian bishop so shamefully secular, and that on the most authentic evidence ; but it is pleasant to see so many shewing a becoming zeal for truth and holiness.

Dionysius of Rome died also this year. His successor Felix wrote an Epistle to Maximus of Alexandria, in which he speaks thus, probably on account of Paul's heresy : " We believe that our Saviour Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary ; we believe that he himself is the eternal God and the Word, and not a man whom God hath taken into himself, so as that man should be distinct from him ; for the Son of God being perfect God, was also made perfect man, being incarnate of the Virgin.*

For two or three years Paul supported himself in the possession of the mother-church of Antioch, and of the episcopal house, and of course of so much of the revenues as depended not on voluntary contributions of the people, by the favour of Zenobia. A party he doubtless had among the people ; but the horror which Socinianism, then at least, excited through the christian world, as well as the flagitiousness of his life, render it impossible that he should have had the hearts of the christians of Antioch at large ; and Zenobia being conquered by the emperor Aurelian, a change took place ; the christians complained ; Aurelian looking on Rome and Italy as in all things a guide to the rest of the world, ordered that the controversy should be decided according to the sentiments of their bishops. Of course Paul was fully expelled, and we hear no more of him in history.

* Conc. Eph. See Fleury, b. 8. c. 4.

Aurelian hitherto had been the friend of christians ; but Pagan superstition and its abettors drove him at length into measures of persecution. The christians were in full expectation of sanguinary treatment, when his death prevented his designs, in the year 275.

Tacitus the successor of Aurelian, after a short reign, left the empire to Probus, in whose second year, A. D. 277, appeared the monstrous heresy of Manes, whose fundamental principle was to account for the origin of evil, by the admission of two first causes independent of each other. But I write not a history of heresies ; it has been performed but too accurately by many, while we have very scanty information of the progress of true religion. This heresy continued long to infest the church, and necessity will oblige me hereafter, if this work be continued, to notice it more distinctly.

Eusebius gives us here the names and characters of several bishops, who successively held several Sees. He speaks highly of the learning and philosophy of some, and of the moral good qualities of others. Of Pamphilus, a minister in Cæsarea of Palestine, he speaks with all the ardour of affection ; but the best thing he asserts of him is, that he suffered much in persecution, and was martyred at last. But this must have been in Dioclesian's persecution, the time of which begins just after the limits prescribed to this volume.

After Probus, Carus, and his two sons, Dioclesian began to reign in year 284. For about eighteen years this emperor was extremely indulgent to the christians. His wife Prisca and daughter Valeria were christians in some sense secretly. The eunuchs of his palace and his most important officers were christians, and with their wives and families openly professed the gospel. Christians held honourable offices in various parts of the empire ; innumerable crowds attended christian worship ; the old buildings could no longer receive them, and in all cities wide and large edifices were erected.*

* Euseb. b. 8, c. 1.

If Christ's kingdom had been of this world, and its strength and beauty were to be measured by secular prosperity, we should here fix the era of its greatness. But, on the contrary, the era of its decline must be dated during the pacific time of Dioclesian. During this whole century the work of God in purity and power had been declining; the connexion with philosophers had been one of the principal causes; outward peace and secular advantages now completed the corruption; discipline, which had been too strict, was now relaxed exceedingly; bishops and people were in a state of malice, and quarrels without end were fomented one among another; and ambition and covetousness had now the ascendancy pretty generally in the christian church. Some there doubtless were who mourned in secret and strove in vain to stop the abounding torrent of evil. The truth of this account seems much confirmed by the extreme dearth of real christian excellencies from the death of Dionysius. None seem, for the space of thirty years, to have risen in the room of Cyprian, Firmilian, Gregory, and Dionysius. No bishop or pastor of eminence for piety, zeal, and labours appeared. Christian worship was yet constantly attended to; the number of nominal converts was increasing; but the faith of Christ itself appeared now an ordinary business, and here ended as far as appears, that great first outpouring of the Spirit of God, which began at the day of Pentecost. Human depravity spread a general decay of godliness through the church, and one generation of men elapsed with hardly any proofs of the spiritual presence of Christ with his church.

The observation of Eusebius, who honestly confesses this declension, is judicious. "The heavy hand of God's judgments, began softly, by little and little, to visit us after his wonted manner, so that the persecution which was raised against us took its first rise from the christians who were in military service. But we were not at all moved with his hand, nor took any pains to return to God, but heaped sin upon sin, thinking, like careless epicureans, that God cared not for, nor would

ever visit us for our sins. And our pretended shepherds, laying aside the rule of godliness, practised among themselves contention and division.” He goes on to observe that the dreadful persecution of Dioclesian was then inflicted on the church, as a just punishment and the most proper chastisement for their iniquities.

Toward the end of the century, Dioclesian practising the superstitious rites of divination, and understanding or guessing from the ill success of his sacrifices, that the presence of a christian servant, who made on his forehead the sign of the cross, was the cause, ordered not only those who were present, but all in his palace to sacrifice, or in case of refusal to be scourged with whips.* He wrote also to the officers of his armies to constrain all the soldiers to sacrifice, or to discharge the disobedient from the service. This is what Eusebius alludes to in the foregoing passage; and many resigned rather than sacrifice. For christian truth was not yet lost, nor was the decay universal. Very few were put to death on this account. The story of Marcellus is remarkable.† Mr. Gibbon has undertaken to justify his death, representing him as punished purely for desertion and military disobedience, in his usual manner suppressing or disguising facts. But the truth is, his death was the effect of a partial persecution, and his conscience was not burdened merely with being a soldier (it was no uncommon thing for christians to serve in the armies at that time) but with the introduction of new rules subversive of christianity. For those who ordered christian soldiers to sacrifice knew that in fact they ordered them to renounce christianity.

It was in the year 298, at Tangier in Mauritania, while every one was employed in feasting and sacrifices, that Marcellus the centurion took off his belt, threw down his vine branch and his arms, and added, “I will not fight any longer under the banner of your emperor, or serve your gods of wood and stone. If the condition of a soldier is such that he is obliged to sacrifice to gods

* Lactantius de morte persecut.

† Acta sincera, Fleury, b. 8, c. 27.

and emperors, I abandon the vine branch and the belt, and quit the service.” “ We plainly see the cause (says Fleury) that forced the christians to desert, they being obliged to partake in idolatrous worship.” The man was ordered to be beheaded. And one Cassianus the register, who was to take down the sentence, cried out aloud that he was shocked at its injustice. Marcellus smiled for joy, foreseeing that Cassianus would be his fellow-martyr, as in fact he was martyred also a month after.

When I read this story toward the conclusion of Gibbon's first volume I thought, by his narrative, that Marcellus had suffered on principles of modern quakerism. I might have added this also to the list of his perversions,* had it then attracted my attention. I need add no further remarks; every reader, who pays the least attention to candour and common sense, sees the principles for which Marcellus suffered.

It seems these preliminaries to the persecution, with which the next century opens, did not affect the minds of christians in general; nor was the spirit of prayer stirred up among them, a certain sign of long and obstinate decay in godliness. Yet there must have been a deep, secret departure from the lively faith of the gospel. Origenism and the learning and philosophy connected with it were extremely fashionable. We may justly conclude then, that the sermons of christian pastors had more in general of a moral and philosophical cast, than any thing purely christian. In truth, justification by faith, and hearty conviction of sin, and the Spirit's influences, I hear little or nothing of all this season. Morals, I doubt not, were preached; but christian men continued in life immoral and scandalous. The state of the church of England from Charles II. down to the middle of the last reign, full of party and faction and animosities and love of the world, yet adorned with learning and full of morality in its public ministrations, seems very much to resemble that of the christian church

* See Milner's Gibbon.

in manners and piety from the death of Dionysius to the end of the century. In one instance there was a great difference, superstition was much stronger in the ancient church; but being enlisted in the service of self-righteousness, and the faith of Christ and the love of God being much buried under it, this diversity does not affect the general likeness.

God, who had exercised long patience, declared at length in the course of his providence, "Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused *my fury to rest upon thee.*"*

But this scene, which introduced quite a new face on the church, and was quickly followed by several surprising revolutions, belongs to the next century.



CHAPTER XVIII.

Some Account of Gregory Thaumaturgus, Theognostus, and Dionysius of Rome.

THESE three persons are all whom I can find belonging to the third century, to whom sufficient justice has not been done already. Of the two last indeed I have scarce any thing to say. Of the first more is recorded. His life was written by Gregory of Nyssen, and though some allowance must be made for the growth of superstitious credulity in his days, yet that all the miraculous powers ascribed to Gregory are fictitious it would be unreasonable to assert. The concurrent testimony of antiquity and the very name of Thaumaturgus† evince the contrary. I shall endeavour to steer as clear of errors on both sides as I can, in putting down every thing that may seem valuable concerning this great man. A small account of him is in Eusebius.‡ Cave and Fleury have also collected the most material things of him from

* Ezek. xxiv. 13.

† Wonderworker.

‡ Book 6, c. 29.

Gregory Nyssen's narrative, and from the former I shall chiefly collect the account.

He was born at Neocæsarea, the metropolis of Cappadocia; his father, zealous for paganism, took care to educate him in idolatry and the learning of the Gentile world. He lost his father when he was fourteen years of age. His mother took care to complete his education and that of his brother Athenodorus, afterwards a christian bishop, as well as himself. He travelled to Alexandria to learn the platonic philosophy, where he was equally remarkable for strictness of life and close attention to his studies. He afterwards put himself under the tuition of the renowned Origen, who then taught at Cæsarea in Palestine, with his brother Athenodorus, and Firmilian, a Cappadocian gentleman, with whom he contracted an intimate friendship. This is the Cappadocian bishop whom we have repeatedly had occasion to mention. With Origen the two brothers continued five years, and were persuaded by him to study the Holy Scriptures; and no doubt is to be made, but that the most assiduous pains were urged by that zealous teacher to ground them in the belief of christianity. On his departure he delivered an eloquent speech, in praise of Origen, before a numerous auditory, a testimony at once of his gratitude and powers of rhetoric.

There is still extant a letter written by Origen to him after he had left him,* in which he exhorts him to apply his knowledge to the promotion of christianity. The best thing in it is, that he advises him to pray fervently and seriously for the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Being now returned to Neocæsarea, he gave himself much to prayer and retirement, and no doubt was in secret prepared and disciplined for the important work to which he was soon after called. Neocæsarea was large and populous, but full of idolatry, the very seat of Satan, so that christianity scarce could gain any entrance into it. Phædimus, bishop of Amasea, a neighbouring city, grieved to see its situation, and hoping much from the

* Origen Philocab. c. 13.

piety and capacity of young Gregory, took pains to engage him in the work of the ministry there. Gregory, from pure modesty, took pains to elude his designs, but was at length prevailed on to accept the charge.

The scene was arduous. He had a church to found, before he could govern it, there being not above seventeen professors of christianity there. I do not believe the vision which his namesake of Nyssen tells of his receiving a creed from John the evangelist and the Virgin Mary. He seems to have been imposed on by the superstitious spirit, then too prevalent. But as he assures us the original, written with his own hand, was preserved in the church of Neocæsarea in his time, and this is a matter of fact of which any person might judge; as the creed itself contains nothing but what is very agreeable to the language of the fathers of the third century, and we have already seen the exact pains which they took in guarding the doctrine of the Trinity against heresies, I apprehend it to be really his; though when the reader has considered it, he will not be surprised at the industry* with which in our times its credit has been impeached. And the whole will deserve to be set down at length, because the orthodoxy of Gregory has been unreasonably called in question, against the express testimony of Eusebius, who, we have seen above, represents him as one of the opposers of Paul of Samosata, at the first council.

“There is one God the Father of the living Word, of the subsisting wisdom and power, and of the eternal express Image; perfect, the Father of the perfect, the Father of the only-begotten Son. One Lord alone of alone, God of God, the character and image of the Deity, the energetic Word, the Wisdom comprehensive of the system of the Universe, and the Power that made all creation, the true Son of the true Father, the Invisible of the invisible, the incorruptible of the incorruptible, the immortal of the immortal, the eternal of the eternal; and one Holy Ghost, having his subsistence of

* See Lardner's Credibility.

God, manifested through the Son to men, the image of the Son, the perfect life of the perfect, the source of life, the holy fountain, sanctification, and the supplier of sanctification, in whom is manifested God the Father, who is above all and in all, and God the Son, who is through all; a perfect Trinity, in glory, eternity, and kingdom, not separated, not divided."

Notwithstanding the prejudices which his idolatrous countrymen must have had against him, Musonius, a person of consequence in the city, received him, and in a very little time his preaching was attended with so great success that he had a numerous congregation. The situation of Gregory, so like that of the primitive christian preachers, in the midst of idolatry, renders it exceedingly probable that he was, as they were, favoured with miraculous gifts: for these the Lord bestowed in abundance, where the name of Jesus had as yet gained no admission; and it is certain that miracles had not ceased in the church.

Gregory Nyssen lived himself within less than a hundred years after our Gregory; and both he and his brother, the famous Basil, speak of his miracles without the least doubt. Their aged grandmother Macrina, who taught them in their youth, had in her younger years been an hearer of Gregory. Basil particularly observes, that she told them the very words which she had heard from him, and assures us that the Gentiles on account of the miracles which he performed used to call him a second Moses. The existence of his miraculous powers, with reasonable persons, seems then unquestionable. It is only to be regretted that the few particular instances which have come down to us are not the best chosen; but that he cured the sick, healed the diseased, and expelled devils, and that thus God wrought by him for the good of souls, and to pave the way for the propagation of the gospel, as it is in itself very credible, so has it the testimony of men worthy to be believed.

Gregory continued successfully employed at Neocæsarea till the persecution of Decius. Swords and axes, fire, wild beasts, stakes and engines to distend the limbs,

iron chairs made red hot, frames of timber set up straight, in which the bodies of the tortured were racked with nails that tore off the flesh. These and a variety of other inventions were used. But the Decian persecution, in general, was before described. Pontus and Cappadocia seem to have had their full share. Relations, in the most unnatural manner, betrayed one another, the woods were full of vagabonds, the towns were empty, and private houses, deprived of their christian inhabitants, became gaols for the reception of prisoners, the public prisons not sufficing for that purpose.

In this terrible situation of things, Gregory considering that his new converts could scarce be strong enough to stand their ground and be faithful, advised them to flee, and to encourage them in it he set them the example. Many of his people suffered, but God restored them at length to peace, and Gregory again returned to exhilarate their minds with his pastoral labours.

In the reign of Gallienus the christians suffered extremely from the ravages of barbarous nations, which gave occasion to Gregory's Canonical Epistle, still extant, in which rules of a wholesome, penitential, and disciplinarian nature are delivered. But there is no need to particularize them.

The last service of his which is recorded, is the part which he took in the first council concerning Paul of Samosata. He died not long after. A little before his death he made a strict inquiry whether there were any in the city and neighbourhood still strangers to christianity. And being told there were about seventeen in all, he sighed and lifting up his eyes to heaven, appealed to God how much it troubled him that any of his fellow-townsmen should remain unacquainted with salvation, yet that his thankfulness was due to God, that when at first he had found only seventeen christians, he had left only seventeen idolators. Having prayed for the conversion of infidels and the edification of the faithful, he peaceably gave up his soul to God.

He was an evangelical man in his whole life, as Basil says. In his devotion he shewed the greatest reverence.

Yea and nay were the usual measures of his communication; how desirable that those who profess to love Jesus, uniformly practised the same. He never allowed himself to call his brother fool; no anger or bitterness proceeded out of his mouth. Slander and calumny, as directly opposite to christianity, he peculiarly hated and avoided. Lies and falsehood, envy and pride, he abhorred. Zealous he was against all corruptions, and Sabellianism, which long after in Basil's time reared up its head, was, he tells us, silenced by the remembrance of what he had taught and left among them.

On the whole, the reader will with me regret, that antiquity has left us such scanty memorials of a man so much honoured of God, so eminently holy, and little inferior in utility among mankind to any from the apostles' days to his own times. For it is not to be conceived that so great and almost universal a change in the religious profession of the citizens of Neocæsarea could have taken place without a marvellous out-pouring of the Holy Spirit in that place. And how instructive and edifying would the narrative have been were we distinctly informed of its rise and progress! Certainly the essentials of the gospel must have been preached in much clearness and purity. In no particular instance was the divine influence ever more apparent since the apostolic age.

Theognostus of Alexandria is an author whose time it is not easy to fix with precision, though it be certain that he is later than Origen, and must belong to the third century. He platonizes after the manner of Origen, in some parts of his writings, yet is he cited by Athanasius as a witness of the Son's consubstantiality with the Father. "For as the sun is not diminished, says he, though it produces rays continually, so likewise the Father is not diminished in begetting the Son, who is his image." It is certain that this is Trinitarian language, and though neither Theognostus nor Gregory, nor some others of the ancient fathers spake always of the persons of the blessed Trinity, with so much exactness as afterwards was done, it would be an extreme

want of candour to rank them with Arians, Sabellians, or the like, when there is clear proof that the foundation of their doctrine was really Trinitarian. It cannot be expected that men should speak always with the same care on a point, before there be an urgent call for it, as afterwards when contrary heresies were formed. The want of attending to this just distinction has nursed several unreasonable cavils in those who eagerly catch at every straw to support heretical notions. Nothing is known of the life of this man; of his eloquence and capacity the proofs are clear and strong.*

The injustice of the attempts made to invalidate the proofs of the antiquity and uninterrupted preservation of the doctrine of the Trinity within the three first centuries, requires me to mention one instance more, which, added to the many already mentioned, will, I think, authorize me to draw this conclusion, that during the first three hundred years, though the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity was variously opposed, yet the whole christian church constantly united in preserving and maintaining it, even from the apostles' days, as the proper sphere within which all the truth, and holiness, and consolation of genuine christianity lies, and exclusive of which one may defy its boldest enemies to produce a single instance of any real progress in piety, made in any place, where the name of Christ was known.

We have before observed that Dionysius of Alexandria, for his zeal against Sabellianism, was suspected of Arianism, and that he fully exculpated himself. A Roman synod had been convened on the account, and Dionysius of Rome,† in the name of the synod, wrote a letter in which he proves, that the Word was not created, but begotten of the Father from all eternity, and distinctly explains the mystery of the Trinity. Such extreme nicety of caution in steering clear of two rocks like those of Sabellianism and Arianism, in which it must be confessed the road is very narrow and very strait, demonstrates that the exact doctrine of the Trini-

* Du Pin, 3d century.

† Du Pin, *ibid.*

ity in Unity, which with so much clearness as to the thing, though necessarily with perfect obscurity as to the manner of the thing, discovers itself every where in the Scriptures, was even then understood with precision, and maintained with firmness throughout the church of Christ.

CHAPTER XIX.

The further Extension of the Gospel in this Century.

IT would fall exactly within the design of this work to explain this at large. The power of real christianity is always the strongest and the clearest in the infancy of things. Exactly contrary to the process in secular arts and sciences, the improvements of following ages are so many depravations. But we must be content with such materials as we have, and let the reader supply, from his own meditations, as much as he can, whatever he may think defective in the following scanty account.

In the reign of Decius, and in the midst of his persecution, about the year 250, the gospel, which had hitherto been chiefly confined to the neighbourhood of Lyons and Vienne, was considerably extended in France. Saturninus was the first bishop of Toulouse, and at the same time several other churches were founded, as at Tours, Arles, Narbonne, and Paris. The bishops of Toulouse and Paris afterwards suffered for the faith of Christ; but they left churches, in all probability, very flourishing in piety.* And France in general was blessed with the light of salvation.

Germany was also, in the course of this century, favoured with the same blessing, especially those parts of it which are in the neighbourhood of France. Cologne, Treves, and Metz, particularly, were evangelized.†

* Book 1, Greg. Tours France, c. 30, Fleury 13, b. 6.

† See Mosh. 3d century.

Of the British isles little is recorded, and that little so obscure and uncertain, that we rather believe that the divine light must have penetrated into our country by this time, from the natural course of things and analogy, than from any positive, unexceptionable testimony.

The Goths being settled in Thrace, during the miserable confusions of this century, some teachers from Asia went to preach the gospel among them. Their holy lives and miraculous powers were much respected by those barbarians, and many of them, from a state perfectly savage, were brought into the light and comfort of christianity.*

The goodness of God made the temporal miseries which afflicted mankind in the reign of Gallienus, subservient to the unspeakably more important concerns of his creatures. The barbarians who ravaged Asia carried away with them into captivity several bishops, who healed diseases, expelled evil spirits in the name of Christ, and preached christianity. The barbarians heard with respect and attention, and numbers of them were converted.† This is all that I can collect of the extension of the gospel among the barbarian ravagers.

CHAPTER XX.

A Short View of the External State of the Church in the third Century.

IT is the duty of christians to shine as lights in the world, in the midst of a *crooked and perverse nation*. That this was actually the case, even in the third century, though much less so than in the two former, and with very rapid diminution of its glory toward the latter end of it, the course of the foregoing narrative has, I trust, made apparent.

* Sozomen, b. 13. 11.

† Sozomen, b. 2, c. 5.

Those with whom the idea of the state of the rest of mankind is familiar, will see this in the strongest light. For three centuries luxury and every abominable vice that can be conceived had been increasing in the Roman empire. There want not lamentable proofs that the severe satires of Juvenal were but too well founded. *All flesh had corrupted their way.* With the loss of civil liberty, even the old Roman virtues of public spirit and magnanimity, though no better than splendid sins in their nature, as Augustine says, had vanished. Civil broils and distractions continually prevailed, for the greatest part of this time, and increased the quantity of vice and misery. The best time was doubtless during the reigns of Trajan, Adrian, and the Antonines. But what was the virtue of those times? Even the most scandalous and unnatural vices were practised without remorse. Men of rank either lived atheistically, or were sunk in the deepest superstition. The vulgar were perfectly ignorant, the rich domineered over the poor, and wallowed in immense opulence, while the provinces groaned under their tyranny; philosophers prated about virtue, without either understanding or practising it; and by far the largest part of mankind, the slaves and the poor, were in remediless indigence, and no methods at all were studied for their convenience or relief. In the mean time the pleasures of men, the stage and the amphitheatre were full of obscenity, savageness, and cruelty.

This was the Roman world; we know much less of the rest of the globe; it was however sunk in ferocious wickedness and ignorance, much below those nations that bowed under the yoke of the Cæsars.

Behold! In the midst of all this chaos arose out of Judea a light of doctrine and practice singularly distinct from the whole of it. A number of persons chiefly of low life, the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, live as men ought to do, with a proper contempt of this vain life, with the sincerest and most steady ambition for another; true philosophers, if real love of wisdom consist, as it must, in the justest views and worship of their Maker,

and an actual acquaintance with him, in real moderation of their passions and desires, and in unfeigned benevolence to all, even to their enemies.

How is it possible that all this could be of man? It was the work of God. This out-pouring of his Holy Spirit lasted for three centuries, debased indeed toward the end of that period, but not extinguished.

This people, diverse from all others, must have a government and an external order among themselves. I am not going to involve myself in the endless mazes of controversy on this point; nor do I see any certain divine rule on the subject. It might, and it naturally would be, various in various places. Men may serve God acceptably under very different modes; yet I think I see some rude outlines of what most commonly obtained in the primitive ages, whence a sketch may be drawn extremely different from most, if not from all the modes which now prevail in the christian world.

The first teachers, the apostles, who planted the first churches, ordained successors, as far as appears, without any consultation of the people. It was not to be expected that any set of persons after them should be regarded as their equals, nor was it reasonable that it should be so. Undoubtedly the choice of bishops devolved on the people.* Their appearance to vote on these occasions, their sometimes forcing of persons to accept the office against their will, and the determination of Pope Leo, long after, against forcing a bishop on a people against their consent, demonstrate this. The persons to be elected to this office were very strictly examined. Public notice was given, that any one might inform against them, if they were vicious and immoral. The judgment of *life* was left to the people, that of *doctrine* belonged more to the other bishops, who ordained them. For the power of ordination belonged properly to bishops alone, though presbyters, a second order of men, who seem to me distinct all along from them, concurred with them and with the people. The same pow-

* Bingham, b. 4, c. 11. Antiquities. Du Pin, end of the third century.

er of electing, in some degree and in some instances, the people had with respect to these presbyters; but the case is by no means so uniformly clear, and in the lower offices of the church the bishop acted still more according to his discretion.

The use of deacons, the third order in the church, is well known. These three obtained very early in the primitive churches. The Epistles of Ignatius (I build only on those parts that are undoubtedly genuine) demonstrate this, and in general the distinction of these offices was admitted through the christian world.

Yet if a christian people were grown very heretical, the bishops thought themselves bound in duty to provide for the instruction of the smaller number, who, in their judgment, loved the truth, as it is in Jesus, by both electing and ordaining a bishop for them. Likewise in sending missionaries to the barbarous nations, it would be absurd to suppose that they waited for the choice of the people. They deputed and ordained whom they approved of for that end.

There were a number of lower offices, door-keepers, sub-deacons, acolyths, or attendants, readers, who by degrees grew up in the christian church. These appear in the third century. A much more candid and true account of them may be given, than what has been imposed on us, with sufficient malignity. It could not be to administer to the pride and sloth of the higher clergy, that these offices were instituted. Christians increased in number, and more labourers were required. Besides, as they had not then any seminaries, the serving of the church in these lower offices (I have the pleasure to see the judicious Calvin unite with Bingham in his sentiments here*) was made an introductory step to the higher offices. And this was their most important use.

The authority of the bishop was by no means unlimited, but it was very great. Nothing could be done in the church without him. The extent of his diocese was called *Παροικία*. Some of these dioceses had a

* Bingham, b. 3. c. 1. Calvin, Institutes, book last.

greater, others a less number of churches which belonged to them. The diocese of Rome had above forty churches, before the end of the third century, as Optatus observes; and this agrees very well with the account before stated,* that under Cornelius, the bishop, there were forty-six priests. Cornelius himself must have ministered particularly at the chief or mother church. Unpreaching prelates were then unknown. The priests of course must have supplied, among them, the service of the other churches. But in these times distinct parishes, with presbyters allotted to them, were not known in cities.† It appears that the bishop sent them successively to minister according to his discretion. But the neighbouring villages, which were annexed to bishoprics, could not be thus supplied. They had even then stated parish priests, who acted under the authority of the bishop.

That bishops were not mere congregational pastors, seems evident from the nature of things, as well as the concurrent testimony of all antiquity. There were seven bishops who belonged to the seven churches of Asia, called Angels in the Book of Revelations. It is absurd to suppose that the great church of Ephesus, in the decline of St. John's life, should be only a single congregation; and most probably the same is true of all the rest. Supposing the christian brethren to consist of five hundred men, they, their families and servants, and occasional hearers, would make an assembly large enough for any human voice. But the christians of Ephesus consisted of many thousands, more probably. So did the church of Jerusalem.‡ The church of Antioch, in Chrysostom's time, consisted of an hundred thousand. I should not wonder if it had half that number in the latter end of the third century. Yet it is certain that dioceses were much smaller than in after times. The vast extension of them proved very inconvenient to the cause of godliness. Archbishop Cranmer wished to correct this evil in our national church, and

* See page 351.

† Bing. b. 9, c. 8.

‡ Acts xx. 21.

wanted neither zeal nor judgment. But that and many other good things slept with the English Reformers.

The choice of bishops and (in part at least) of presbyters by the people, is a custom which seems naturally to have grown out of the circumstances of the church at that time. The first bishops and presbyters were appointed by the apostles themselves,* nor could I ever find the least vestige in scripture of their appointment by the people. There was not a sufficient judgment in any for this trust; the world being at that time Pagan or Jewish, or at least infant in christianity. Apostolical wisdom and authority, under God, supplied the want in the next succession of bishops. As the judgment of the people matured, and especially as the grace of God was strong among them, they were rendered more fit for the appointment. A precedent was set, not scriptural indeed, but of very high antiquity; and the practice continued during at least the three first centuries. On the other hand I do not find that the people had any power in deposing a bishop, if we may judge from the well authenticated case of Paul of Samosata. The cognizance of the crimes of bishops was left to a council or synod of neighbouring bishops and presbyters, and in that, as well as all material affairs which concerned the church in general, the authority of such councils was held very great, from early times; nor does it appear that the christian laity had any direction in them.

I have given this brief sketch of primitive ecclesiastical government, as it appears to me. I mean neither to provoke nor to invite any controversy on this contentious subject, but only to give a general view of the first government of christian people. I wonder not at the controversies which have been started on the subject; something may be said for episcopacy, for presbytery, and for independency. To me it seems an unhappy prejudice to look on any one of the forms as of divine right, and scriptural authority. Circumstances

* Acts xiv. 23

will make different modes more proper in one place and at one time than at another. If the reader sees the subject in the light in which it appears to me, he will be in no danger of bigotry, but will see much reason for moderation and latitudinarian indifference; and I would it were so with all christians, that our zeal might be employed and spent on what is really divine and essentially scriptural. So balanced are the arguments for the three forms of church-government, that the independent plan seems to me to have no general foundation either in scripture or antiquity, in any one instance; the presbyterian to be scriptural and primitive, so far as the institution of the clergy is concerned, but defective for want of a bishop; the episcopal form to have obtained in all the primitive churches without exception; only what effectually checks the pride of those who are fond of the pomp of hierarchy, ancient episcopacy had no secular mixtures and appendages; the pastoral character of bishops, together with the smallness of their dioceses, always adapted to pastoral inspection, made them more similar to the presbyterian hierarchy; in fine, the share of the people in christian government, though never on the plan of independent congregations, gives yet some plausible colour to independency.

The discipline of the primitive church was very strict; it even degenerated, as has been observed, into excessive severity. A clergyman once deposed for flagitiousness was never restored to his order. This might be right; another custom which prevailed at length cannot be vindicated. A person once ejected for his vices from the church might be restored;* on a relapse, being again ejected, he could never be favoured with church communion, though by no means supposed to be necessarily excluded from the mercy of God in Christ. Their care against heresies has been abundantly shewn, and their zeal against viciousness of practice was equal to this. Though it was carried

* Du Pin.

to too great a length, and was mixed with superstition, yet how beautiful does it appear! How demonstrative of the power and reality of godliness among them, in comparison of the licentiousness of our times! Christian assemblies were then frequented with great constancy, and the Eucharist was generally administered whenever they met for public worship. But greater proofs, even than these, of their superior regard to God and every thing that is really good, remain yet to be mentioned.

Their liberality to the indigent was wonderful. There was nothing like it at that time in the world. The Jews were a very selfish, hard-hearted people; the Gentiles lived in luxury and splendor, if they could; but care for the poor seems to have made no part of their jurisprudence, nor to have been at all a fashionable virtue. I never could learn that philosophers, while they harangued on virtue, either recommended much, or practised any kindness to the bulk of mankind, the slaves and the vulgar. Indeed their own precepts are directed to the higher ranks, and they seem to forget that these were of the human species. An hospital, an almshouse, or any provision of that kind for the poor, was unknown in the Pagan and philosophic world. But when the religion of Him who is no respecter of persons began to prevail, the barbarous spirit of aristocracy lost its dominion among christians, while it still prevailed in the manners of the rest of mankind. Christians felt themselves all sinners, all in the sight of God on a level. Necessitated to keep up and preserve still a due subordination of ranks, and whatever is wholesome in government, the christian master found his slave, before God, his equal redeemed by the same blood of God made man. The pride of birth, station, and quality, was crushed; they made it their business to relieve the miserable. The Pagans admired their brotherly love. We have seen above a thousand and fifty widows and impotent persons maintained by the liberality of the Roman church under Cornelius; we have seen the active charity of the archdeacon Lauren-

tius, in finding out and assisting miserable objects, punished with a fiery death. The very spirit and taste of christians, with the frugality and simplicity of their lives and manners, enabled them abundantly to help the necessitous; while the rest of the world persecuted, and philosophers themselves, dependant on the great, and looking on the poor as nothing, reasoned against them. "O God of all grace, whose tender mercies are over all thy works, this must be thy religion which humbled and sweetened the hearts of men, which taught them practically to regard all men as brethren, and no delight in doing good to all, without distinction of persons!"

But the most singularly striking characteristic of this people has not yet been noticed. Though they had a regular polity, guarded by great strictness of discipline, distinguished into a number of communities, each administered by a bishop, presbyters, and deacons, and concentrated by general councils held from time to time; they neither had, nor strove to obtain the least secular support of any kind. They lay exposed to the rage of the whole world around them, incited by its natural enmity against God and love of sin, and finding itself condemned by these upstarts as deservedly obnoxious to the divine displeasure. The whole Roman world embraced thousands of discordant sects and parties; these all tolerated one another, because all agreed to treat sin with lenity, and to allow one another's religion to be right, on the whole. It was impossible for christians to do this: hence the spirit of persecution was excited, and whoever at this day lives in the same sincere hostility against all sin, and in the exercise of the same charity, patience, and heavenly-mindedness as they did, will undesignedly, yet unquestionably, excite the wrath of the rest of mankind, just in the same manner. But how precarious their state in society was, on this account, is evident. They had not the least legal or secular aid against persecution. Obligated, like the rest of the subjects of the Roman empire, to contribute to the general defence, and to serve in the Roman armies, when called on, as much as others, they had

no civil privileges : if an emperor chose to persecute, they were perfectly defenceless, and had no political resource against oppression.

What could be the reason of this ? Shall we say their circumstances were, during the first three hundred years, too low, and their means too weak to encourage them to attempt any thing of this kind ? This has been said by those who are not willing to allow that their passiveness under injuries proceeded from principle. But suppose now that they thought it right to resist *the powers that be*, and that those who resist *do not receive to themselves damnation*, but merit the tribute of applause for supporting the natural rights of man ; then as no people on earth were ever more unjustly treated, they would naturally feel their injuries as other men do, and admitting them too weak and inconsiderable, in the first century, to have attempted any thing, surely in the second, and much more in the third, their thousands and tens of thousands must have been capable of shaking the foundations of the empire. So far from being without means, they seem to have had much greater than many who have disturbed the repose of kingdoms.

Here is "*imperium in imperio*," a regular, well united phalanx of men, inured to frugal habits and a variety of hardships ; not a mere mob of levellers, but men taught to obey their religious governors, and submitting to great strictness of discipline. Among their governors, if history had not informed us so, we are sure there must have been some men of genius, fortitude, and capacity, who already had exercised their talents in the art of government, and possessed that eloquence which inflames the passions of the lower sort. Cyprian of Carthage is undoubtedly one of these. The same courage, capacity, discretion, and activity, which made him an oracle over half the Roman empire among christians, would, had it been exerted in a military line, have been formidable to the throne of the Cæsars. Their brethren in the Roman armies might have taught them military discipline ; the riches which a number of them possessed might have purchased arms and military

stores. Those captive bishops, who gained so strong an ascendant over the ignorant, barbarous nations, might have easily effected an alliance between them and those of the christian name.

The reader sees the consequence ; I do not say they would have prevailed in the end ; nothing is more uncertain than the issue of war : but supposing them to have thought resistance lawful, amidst the distractions of the Roman empire from within and from without, they had both temptations and probabilities sufficiently strong to have excited a rebellion, such as any other people would have done, who in knowledge and civilization were not inferior to those among whom they lived. The conclusion seems undeniable ; if a set of men are very unjustly treated, have probable means of redressing themselves by force, and think it lawful to use those means, they will do so of course. On the contrary, it appears not from a few passages here and there only, but from the whole tenour of their writings, and, what is still more, from their uniform practice, without a single exception, that they thought it unchristian to seek this mode of relief. Patience, and prayer, and charity were their only arms. Nor do you find a single instance of a christian intermeddling with the politics of his time.

Must we not then say that they understood the rules laid down in the thirteenth chapter to the Romans, and other parts of the New Testament, in a literal manner ? That they thought it wrong to revenge injuries, public as well as private, and referred themselves wholly to him who hath said, "Vengeance is mine !" I believe we have no other alternative. This was the sum of christian politics ; and in this light what an advantage this spirit proved to them in making them feel themselves strangers and pilgrims on earth, in causing them to long for the heavenly state, in deadening their affections to the world, and in exercising them in faith and charity, is not hard to conceive ; and whenever real christians, in our times, shall more fully emancipate themselves from the ambitious notions, with which

the present habits and prejudices of men infect them, and through divine grace catch the spirit of the primitive believers in this point, they will then see a beauty in the New Testament principles, on this subject, of which they have now little idea: the love of the world will cease so strongly to entangle them, and primitive, apostolic faith and practice may again visit the earth in its genuine simplicity.

The monastic spirit, I have already observed, had begun to appear during the Decian persecution. About the year 270 lived Anthony the Egyptian, the first founder of these communities. Athanasius has written his life.* A modern, who is sensible of ancient fashionable absurdities, and insensible of present ones, would be tempted to think that he must have been a very weak person who could write it, without considering that posterity, quick-sighted to the follies of *our* age, may be under the same temptation to judge in the same manner of great men in our times. In truth, Athanasius was a man of solid sense and capacity; but these are no defence against modish errors, and unhappily the Monkish superstition was growing into high admiration. Anthony, it seems, perverting a few texts of scripture, took upon him to live in solitude. His austerities were excessive, and ridiculous stories are told of his contests with the devil, not worth reading; only I see in them a dangerous spirit of self-righteous pride and vain glory, by which this same Anthony was encouraged in his progress, and which will lead a man very far in external shews of holiness, while there is little of the reality. It is probable that his life, as it is recorded by Athanasius, might, as superstition grew more and more reputable, appear admirable in the eyes of many much better men than Anthony himself.

We shall leave Anthony still alive, propagating the monastic spirit, and extending its influence not only into the next century, but for many ages after, and conclude this view of the state of the third century, with

* Fleury, b. viii. 6 sect. &c.

expressing our regret that the faith and love of the gospel received, toward the close of it, a dreadful blow from the encouragement of this unchristian practice.

CHAPTER XXI.

Testimonies to the Church of Christ from its Enemies.

THE fastidious indifference, at least, if not the virulent enmity shewn to the gospel by the great men of Greece and Rome, during the three first centuries, leaves one little reason to expect much account of christians through the channel of their writings. A few cursory, sarcastic, and ill-informed reflections are all that can be found, in our days, concerning more modern revivals and propagation of evangelical truth and godliness, in writers of polite estimation. Something however of this sort is to be gleaned up which may throw some light on the state of religion in the second and third centuries. One writer indeed, Celsus, particularly in the extracts of him preserved by Origen, will shew us perhaps more than all the rest put together. Dr. Lardner has laboured abundantly in this point, for the purpose of establishing the general credibility of the gospel. My views in throwing together a few quotations must be for a different purpose ; to illustrate the character of real christians, and point out some of the effects of the work of the Holy Spirit upon them. Lardner's Collections will however be serviceable to my plan as well as to his own.

In the former part of the second century flourished the stoic philosopher Epictetus. Arian has published his discourses. In one passage he occasionally speaks of "the Galilæans, as indifferent to sufferings from madness or from habit."

These Galilæans are obviously christians. For what cause they were indifferent to sufferings, we shall be

willing to learn from those who better understand the subject. Indeed they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, because they knew in themselves that they had in heaven a better and enduring substance. Christian faith and hope afford motives truly deserving a better name than madness or habit. But the fact is attested by this prejudiced philosopher, that christians were then exposed to singular sufferings, and that they bore them with a composure and serenity so astonishing, that philosophers knew not how to account for their patience. Strengthened they were indeed with might, by the glorious power of their God, to all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness.

In the same century Apuleius, a ludicrous author, in his *Metamorphosis* speaks of a baker, a good sort of man, troubled with a bad wife possessed of every vice, perverse, a drunkard, lewd, a follower of vain observances, who pretended that the Deity was *only one*.

I suppose Apuleius would not have noticed her other crimes, had she not been guilty of this last. See the difference which christianity has made in the world. Through Europe the character of any man's understanding would be much impeached at present, who should seriously assert a plurality of Gods. The belief of the Divine Unity is, by a polite author of the second century, classed with an assemblage of vices. What have you been doing, philosophers, that you never could rid mankind of polytheism, which every philosopher now despises? But let the philosopher know, that God has effected this by the gospel. This baker's wife is evidently a christian, therefore loaded with reproaches, probably unjust: her husband is as plainly a Pagan, therefore a good sort of man, as the world generally allows its followers to be; "if ye were of the world, the world would love its own."

The extracts from Celsus, who wrote in the latter end of the second century, preserved in Origen's work against him, are very valuable in the light which I have stated. Take a few of them, and consider what may justly be inferred from them concerning the nature of

the gospel and the characters of its professors. I shall select a few, partly from my own observations, and partly as Dr. Lardner has given us them in his Collections. A particular reference to each of them will be needless. The reader must be prepared to hear bitter things. A more spiteful calumniator hardly ever existed ; but he may serve a purpose which he never intended.

“ If they say, “ Do not examine,” and the like, in their usual manner, it is however incumbent on them to teach what those things are which they assert, and whence they are derived.”

“ Wisdom in life is a bad thing, but folly is good.”

“ Christ was privately educated, and served for hire in Egypt ;* got acquainted with miraculous arts there, returned, and for those miracles, declared himself God.”

“ The apostles were infamous men, publicans and abandoned mariners.”

“ Why should you, when an infant, be carried into Egypt, lest you should be murdered ? God should not fear being put to death.”

“ You say that God was sent to sinners ; but why not to those who were free from sin ? What harm is it not to have sinned ?”

“ You encourage sinners, because you are not able to persuade any really good men ; therefore you open the doors to the most wicked and abandoned.”

“ Some of them say, do not examine, but believe, and thy faith shall save thee.”

“ These are our institutions,” (speaking of christians with a sneer) “ let not any man of learning come here, nor any wise man, nor any man of prudence ; for these things are reckoned evil by us. But whoever is unlearned, ignorant, and silly, let him come without fear.” Thus they own that they can gain only the foolish, the vulgar, the stupid slaves, women and children. They who conversed with him when alive, and heard his voice, and followed him as their master, when they saw

* The authenticity of St. Matth. ch. ii. which has been unreasonably denied, is established by this passage.

him under punishment and dying, were so far from dying with him or for him, or being induced to despise sufferings, that they denied that they were his disciples ; but now you die with him."

"He had no reason to fear any mortal now, after he died, and as you say he was a God."

"He persuaded only twelve abandoned sailors, and publicans, and did not persuade even all these."

"At first when they were but few they agreed. But when they became a multitude they were rent again and again, and each will have their own factions ; for factious spirits they had from the beginning."

"They are now so split into different sects, that they have only the name left them in common."

"All wise men are excluded from the doctrine of their faith ; they call to it only fools and men of a servile spirit."

He frequently upbraids christians for reckoning him who had a mortal body to be God, and looking on themselves as pious on that account.

"The preachers of their Divine Word only attempt to persuade fools, mean and senseless persons, slaves, women, and children. What harm can there be in being learned, well-informed, and both in being and appearing a man of knowledge ? What obstacle can this be to the knowledge of God ? Must it not be an advantage ?

"We see these itinerants shewing readily their tricks to the vulgar, but not approaching the assemblies of wise men, nor daring there to shew themselves ; but wherever they see boys, a crowd of slaves and ignorant men, there they thrust in themselves and shew off their doctrine."

"You may see weavers, tailors, and fullers, illiterate and rustic men in their houses, but not daring to utter a word before persons of age, experience, and respectability ; but when they get hold of boys privately, and silly women, they recount wonderful things, that they must not mind their fathers or their tutors, but obey them, as their fathers and guardians are quite ignorant

and in the dark, but themselves alone have the true wisdom. And if the children obey them, they pronounce them happy, and direct them to leave their fathers and tutors, and go with the women and their play-fellows into the chambers of the females, or into a tailor's or fuller's shop, that they may learn perfection."

"In other mysteries, the crier uses to say, whoever has clean hands, and a good conscience, and a good life, let him come in. But let us hear whom they call. "Whoever is a sinner, a fool, an infant, a lost wretch, the kingdom of God will receive him"—"An unjust man, if he humble himself for his crimes, God will receive him; but a just man who has proceeded in a course of virtue from the beginning, if he look up to him he will not be received."

He compares a christian doctor to a quack, who promises to heal the sick, on condition that they keep from intelligent practitioners, lest his ignorance be detected.

"You will hear them, though differing so widely from one another, and abusing one another so foully, making that boast, "the world is crucified to me, and I to the world."*

"The same things are better said by the Greeks, and without the imperious denunciation of God, or the Son of God."

"If one sort introduce one doctrine, another another, and all join in saying, "Believe, if you would be saved, or depart;" what are they to do, who desire really to be saved? Are they to determine by the throw of a die? Where are they to turn themselves, or whom to believe?"

"Do you not see, that any man, that will, may carry you away and crucify you and your demon, as you say, the Son of God gives you no help?"

But enough of Celsus. He would not deserve a moment's attention, were it not for the light which he throws on the history of the christians of his own times, that is, of the second century.

* Gal. vi.

It appears evident that there was then a singular sort of persons, subject to all manner of ill treatment from the rest of the world, and who might be hunted down at pleasure by violence or by calumny. Celsus insults them on account of their defenceless condition. Had they resisted evil with evil, his malignity would have taught him to reproach their turbulence and seditiousness. Undoubtedly then they were a meek, quiet, peaceable, inoffensive people. It appears also that they worshipped a person named Jesus, who had been crucified at Jerusalem, and worshipped him as GOD, and Celsus derides their folly on that account; in his view of things, that the same person should be both God and man was the greatest inconsistency. Their doctrine concerning Christ appears to him foolish beyond measure, fit only for the understanding of fools, and beneath the regard of wise men. Even from his loose and sarcastic views of it one may conclude, that they laid great stress on faith; that the exercise of it was connected with salvation, but that this exercise in its whole nature was contrary to all that is esteemed wise and great in the world. It was also a great stumbling block to Celsus, that men the most wicked and abandoned might be saved by faith in Jesus, and that men's confidence in moral virtues was a bar to their salvation. Nor does it appear that the number of converts among the wise or great was large; the lower ranks of men were best disposed to receive it, and the bulk of christian professors consisted of these.

From these premises, with a careful study of the sacred volume, any man, possessed of a humble spirit, may see what the religion was which Celsus so vehemently reprobates. It could not be the doctrine of common morality. He owns indeed they taught this, though he says that the philosophers taught it better. One may appeal to any person almost at this day, whether christian morals are not immensely superior to any thing that is to be learnt from Plato, Tully, or Seneca. It has been the fashion to extol the moral part of scripture, I fear with an insidious eye to the doctrinal. What that

was in Celsus' days, he himself, in a measure, tells us. "Christ crucified, the living and true God, the only Saviour of sinful men; the necessity of renouncing our own wisdom and righteousness, salvation through believing alone, dependance on our supposed goodness, ruinous and fatal." It is certain that moral doctrine, had that been the main part of the christian scheme, would not so much have provoked the enmity of Celsus.

The peculiar doctrines of the gospel, man's fallen state, justification by Jesus Christ alone, divine illumination and influence, these which excite the ill will of man by nature now as much as then; these were plainly the doctrines which occasioned such misrepresentation and abuse as that we have seen.

If the reader were to dip into some controversial pamphlets published against the revival of godliness in our own times, he would see a strong conformity of taste and sentiment between Celsus and many who call themselves christian pastors. Circumstances vary; the dresses of religious profession will alter in the world's course of things. The undiscerning will be thence liable to form a wrong estimate. But there is no new thing under the sun. That which, in our times, has been derided as enthusiasm, was thus treated in the second century; and he who pleases may see in England the same sort of persons, living by the faith of the Son of God, derided by persons of the same stamp as Celsus. And I add to the remarks made on him by others, as giving a good testimony to the miracles and facts of the gospel, that he testifies also the work of the Spirit of God, in his day, and shews us what sort of doctrine was preached and professed by christians at that time.

Lucian of Samosata was a contemporary of Celsus. He has already been mentioned as throwing considerable light on the history of christians in the story of Peregrinus. The delusion into which this hypocritical christian was suffered to fall, after his apostacy, deserves to be noticed as a warning to those who use the name of Jesus for a cloak to sinister pursuits.

He publicly burnt himself in the sight of all Greece, soon after the Olympic games were over.* He did it to gain himself a name, and he had his reward. Heathen authors speak honourably of him. The lustre of his philosophic life and ostentatious suicide expiated, in the eyes of men of this world, the guilt and infamy of his juvenile profession of the gospel. A statue was erected to him at Parium in Mysia, which was supposed to be oracular.

The depth of iniquity, in a christian view, may seem the perfection of virtue in a philosophical. *The Lord seeth not as man seeth.*

Lucian tells us also of one Alexander, a false prophet, who deluded mankind by oracular falsehoods. Some epicureans detected and exposed his fallacies, which made him declare that Pontus was full of atheists and christians, who had the assurance to raise slanderous stories against him. And he excited the people to drive them away with stones. He appointed mysterious rites, like those of Athens, and on the first day of the solemnity proclamation was made as at Athens. "If any epicurean, christian, or atheist, be come hither as a spy upon these mysteries, let him depart with all speed. And a happy initiation to those who believe in God." Then they thrust the people away, he going before and saying, "Away with the christians:" then the multitude cried out again, "Away with the epicureans."

We see here again that there is nothing new under the sun. A fervent or artful supporter of old Pagan superstitions finds himself opposed by two sorts of people, the most opposite to one another possible, epicurean skeptics, men of no religious principle, and christian believers. It is so at this day. A christian and a skeptic would unite to discountenance papal superstitions, but with how different a spirit! the one with compassion and gravity, the other with carelessness and levity. And with how different a design! the former to establish the true worship of God, the latter to support universal profaneness.

* Lardner's Collect. c. xix.

The author Lucian himself was an epicurean, as full of wit as of profaneness. His dialogues abound in sarcastic insinuations against the fashionable idolatry. He did not know that he was co-operating with christians in subverting the abominations which had subsisted for so many ages. His writings were doubtless of use in this respect. And who knows how serviceable, under God, the present fashionable spirit of depreciating and lowering popery may be to the general establishment of christianity, though nothing be farther from the thoughts of those political skeptics who are engaged in it !

There is a dialogue, called *Philopatris*, ascribed to Lucian, but probably written by some other person somewhat later. Doubtless it is of high antiquity. It ridicules the doctrine of the Trinity. "*One three, three one.*" The most high God, Son of the Father, the Spirit proceeding from the Father." Such are the expressions in the dialogue. He speaks also of "a beggarly, sorrowful company of people;" he insinuates their disaffection to government, that they wished for bad news and delighted in public calamities. Some of them fasted ten whole days without eating, and they spent whole nights in singing hymns." Who does not see in all this the language of an enemy, describing men of holy lives and mortified affections worshipping the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and elevated in their desires and spirit above the world, that is real christians ?

Aristides the sophist, another contemporary of Celsus, speaks with indignation against some persons of his day, whom he observes in manners to be not unlike the impious people in Palestine ; for they acknowledge not the gods, they differ from the Greeks and all good men, dextrous in subverting houses and disturbing families ; contributing nothing to public festivals, but dwelling in corners, they are wonderfully wise."*

Thus, when men are out of humour with any persons, they compared them to christians, who were thus made

* Lardner's Collections, c. xix.

the off-scouring of all things. Their singular abstinence from all reigning vices and follies, and their steady adherence to the worship of the living God, appears from hence, and we have here an additional testimony to the strength of the divine operations on their minds.

Much about the same time Galen, the famous physician, gave testimony to the firmness and perseverance of christians: "It is easier," says he, "to convince the disciples of Moses and Christ than physicians and philosophers who are addicted to particular sects;" so that their fortitude or obstinacy was proverbial at that time, and they were a people then well known in the world.

Plotinus was one of the most celebrated disciples of the new platonic school in this century, the genius of which, as formed by Ammonius, has been before described. He had studied under Ammonius, and by the strength of his parts, the multiplicity of his literary acquisitions, and the gravity of his manners, attained a very high reputation in the world. He imitated Socrates in his pretensions to a communion with a demon, and was by his disciples looked on as something celestial. Persons of the greatest quality revered him; the emperor Gallienus himself was once on the point of giving him a ruined city in Campania, in which he might settle a platonic republic. The man seems, to his dying day, to have supported his philosophic reveries. "I am still in expectation," says he, as he was just dying; "and that which is divine in us, I am endeavouring to rejoin to the divine part of the universe."* Undoubtedly he alluded to the idea of "God being the soul of the universe," that pantheistic compound of pride and atheistic absurdity which was the proper creed of most of the ancient philosophers, and was even more impious than all the fables of vulgar paganism.†

The oracle of Apollo, we are told, after his death, informed his admirers that his soul was in the Elysian fields with Plato and Pythagoras. Such were the arti-

* Fleury.

† See this point ably discussed in Warburton's *Legation of Moses*.

fices by which satan and his human followers endeavoured to raise up rivals to the christians. In a work professedly illustrating the operations of the Spirit of God, it seems proper to notice the contrasts, or rather the counterfeits by which the spirit of falsehood endeavoured to support the declining cause of idolatry. Its vulgar and gross scenes were in part abandoned, and a more refined habit was given to it by philosophy, pretending to wisdom and virtue in a high degree. But holiness it could not produce, because humility and the faith of Jesus were not there. Pride was its predominant feature, and while thousands found, even in this life, the salutary benefits of christianity, philosophers prated concerning virtue, and did nothing either for the honour of God, or the good of mankind.

One of the most studious and laborious disciples of Plotinus was Amelius. It is evident from a passage* of Eusebius, that he made attempts to unite something of christianity with platonism, just as we have seen Origen, who was of the same school, mix something of the latter with the former, to the great prejudice of the gospel. "This was the word," says he, "by whom, he being himself eternal, were made all things that are ; the same whom the barbarian affirms to have been in the place and dignity of a principal, and to be with God, and to be God, by whom all things were made, and in whom every thing that was made has its life and being ; who, descending into body and putting on flesh, took the form of man, though he even then gave proof of the majesty of his nature ; nay, and after his dissolution he was deified again, and is God, the same he was before he descended into body, and flesh, and man."

This may be called no mean testimony to St. John's gospel, (for he is doubtless the barbarian here mentioned :) the ideas of christianity, it seems, in some loose ambiguous manner, were admitted by these philosophers, and incorporated into their system, just as a modern Swedenburg, a Rousseau, and a Bolingbroke are

* Euseb. Pr. Ev. See Lardner's Collections, chap. xxxiii.

not unwilling to ennoble their compositions with some sublime christian sentiments, confusedly understood ; while yet they stand aloof from the society of christians as no better than barbarians, and make not, in their own case, the least approach to the faith and love of Jesus.

Thus Longinus also, a scholar of the same school, and well acquainted with Plotinus, has enriched his Treatise on the Sublime with a quotation from the first chapter of Genesis, and calls Moses a man of no mean character.* A fragment of his also which has been preserved, and of which I see no reason to doubt the authenticity, speaks of Paul of Tarsus as one of the first orators, who he observes was the first supporter of a doctrine not demonstrated.

The passage seems to carry internal proofs of its genuineness. It has been said that it has been forged by some christian. But why should any christian be charged with such a crime on mere presumption ? What temptation could there be for it ? Against a mere fancy, in addition to the authority of the manuscript of the gospels from which the passage was taken, I shall venture to place the character of Longinus himself, a judicious critic, if ever there was one in the world ; very capable of seeing the beauties of St. Paul's compositions, by the excellency of his taste ; of confessing them from the candour of his temper ; and of overlooking what ought principally to have fixed his attention, from his entire indifference to religion : I may add also, that the style is exactly like his, rather nervous than elegant.

We see hence how well christians were known in the third century, what respect their doctrine even then obtained in the world from those who could not bear the thought of embracing it for themselves.

Porphyry is the last unwilling witness for christians whom I shall mention within the third century. Indeed there is a work bearing his name, entitled the Philosophy of Oracles, which appears to have been written in the time of Constantine, or after the civil establish-

*ΟΥ ΤΥΧΩΝ ΕΥΝΟ.

ment of christianity. There are in it very strong testimonies in favour of the gospel. But as its date is evidently beyond the period before us, the consideration of it properly belongs to the history of the next century.

This man was born at Tyre in Phœnicia, was a scholar of Plotinus, and, like the rest of that school, maintained a gravity of manners, and entered vigorously into platonic refinements; but in acrimony against christians he far exceeded them all. He took much pains to overturn the gospel, and it must be confessed his learning and acuteness were considerable. The very few fragments extant of his works give one indeed no great opportunity to judge of the extent of his capacity, or of the depth of his judgment. But, from the serious pains taken by the ancient christians to confute him, we may conclude that his abilities were of a far higher order than those of Celsus.

In a passage preserved by Eusebius,* he censures the the famous Origen for leaving Gentilism and embracing the barbarian temerity, that is, the gospel. That he is wrong in the fact is certain. Origen was brought up under christian parents; but I had almost said, he deserved the reproach for paying such extravagant respect to the enemies of christianity. Porphyry allows him to have been a great proficient in philosophy, and says that he was very conversant with Plato, Longinus, and the works of the pythagoreans and stoics; that he learnt from these the allegorical method of explaining the Greek mysteries, and by forced interpretations inconsistent in themselves, and unsuitable to those writings, applied it to the Jewish scriptures.

Fas est et ab hoste doceri.—The fanciful mode of Origen in interpreting scripture is here justly condemned by Porphyry. The ammonian scheme is allowed here by him to be unsuitable to those writings. Origen was wrong in making such attempts. Let the word of God stand simple and alone, and let philosophers be left to their own inventions. The enmity of Porphyry

* Euseb. b. 6, c. 18

is not abated by the complaisance of philosophizing christians, and their concessions make no converts to evangelical truth.

His objections to the book of Daniel, though they shew him a strong, but ineffectual, adversary to christianity, fall not within our design. The same may be said of various cavils which he uttered against many passages in the gospels, a sufficient specimen of which spirit we have seen in Celsus.

The same ingenuity and malevolence failed him not in forming plausible objections, wherever he seemed to have an opportunity. The censure which St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Galatians, has left upon St. Peter, engaged his attention, and induced him, from an occasional difference between the apostles, to form an argument* against the whole of their religion. I have had an opportunity above to give my thoughts on the subject: I may add here that the very clear testimony which St. Peter gives to the inspired character of St. Paul, toward the conclusion of his Second Epistle, at the same time that it demonstrates the harmony of the apostles, reminds one of the fairest monuments of St. Peter's humility and candour. These things appear as so many testimonies to the character of christians from enemies. Surely truth, and wisdom, and goodness may well be presumed to be with those, whom their adversaries assault with such frivolous objections.

On account of an epidemical disorder raging in a certain city, Porphyry observes, "Men wonder now that distempers have siezed the city so many years, Æsculapius and the other gods no longer dwelling among them; for since Jesus was honoured, no one has received any public benefit from the† gods."

What a testimony is this to the great progress of christianity in his day! Malevolence confesses, while she complains.

"Matrons and women," says Porphyry, "compose their senate; they rule in the churches, and the priest-

* Lardner's Collections, c. xxxvii.

† Eusebius.

ly order is disposed of according to their good pleasure.”*

The falsity of this is notorious; but the testimony here given, by the mouth of an enemy, to the piety of women, is perfectly agreeable to the accounts of the New Testament, and the history of all revivals of godliness in every age, in none of which women had the government, in all by their piety a great personal concern. “There is neither male nor female, but *ye are all one in Christ Jesus*.”

“If Christ be the way of salvation, the truth, and the life, and they only who believe in him shall be saved, what became of the men who lived before his coming?”†

The reader has often heard similar objections made in our days. The christians preached then the same doctrine of salvation, only by Christ, which is now stigmatized as uncharitable. The same may be said of the everlasting punishment of unbelievers.

One passage more shall close the subject of Porphyry.

“A person asked Apollo how to make his wife relinquish christianity? It is easier perhaps, replied the oracle, to write on water, or to fly into the air, than to reclaim her. Leave her, in her folly, to hymn in a faint, mournful voice the dead God, who publicly suffered death from judges of singular wisdom.”‡

This is a story told by Porphyry, a memorable testimony of the constancy of christians. It appears also that they were accustomed to worship Jesus as God, and that they were not ashamed of this, notwithstanding the ignominy of his cross. The testimony given here, to the wisdom of Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate, will not so readily be admitted.

The enemies of vital godliness, in our days, may see from these testimonies, laid together, that their ancient brethren in infidelity have been before-hand with them in all their most material objections. What was the doctrine, spirit, and conduct of real christians, appears from their testimony. And the work of the Spirit of God

* Eusebius.

† Ibid.

‡ Bullet's History.

on the hearts of men, in attaching them to Jesus, and in divorcing them from all that the world delights in, is as evident as the malignity of our apostate nature in hating and opposing it.

CHAPTER XXII.

Connexion between the Doctrine and Practice of Primitive Christians.

I AM sensible that many parts of the foregoing history will appear very reprehensible to some in point of candour. “Why such solicitude to prove men Trinitarians in opinion? Why so strict an eye kept up all along on the doctrines commonly called evangelical by certain persons? What signify opinions, if men’s practice be right? Why is not all the stress of commendation laid on holiness of life, integrity, and charity?”

The language is specious, but is chargeable with this notion, that it supposes that there is no real connexion between doctrine and practice. It must not be admitted by a christian, however fashionable the sentiment be, that one sort of opinions is as good as another, with respect to influence on the practice. The scripture connects sanctification with belief of the truth.* Our Lord himself prays that his disciples may be sanctified through the truth.† The blood of Christ purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God.‡ And a right faith in Jesus overcomes the world. St. John challenges men to prove that they can overcome the world by any other way,§ and in the chapter now alluded to he is very particular in describing what that faith is. In fine, Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.|| If this zeal for good works be the ef-

* John xvii, 18.

† Thess. ii. 13.

‡ Heb. ix. 14.

§ 1 John v. 5.

|| Titus ii. 14.

fect of his redemption, it should be conceived, that persons who disbelieve the doctrines essentially concerned in his redemption, can possibly have any zeal for good works, unless it be supposed that men should be able to attain a certain end, without the use of, and even with an aversion to, the means which God has appointed for that purpose.

The peculiar doctrines of the gospel are, original sin, justification by the grace of Jesus Christ, his Godhead and atonement, the Divinity and efficacious influences of the Holy Ghost. We appeal to the scriptures for the proof of this assertion. If it cannot be proved from thence, let it be considered as not proved at all. The tradition of the church, were it more uniform than it is, can never sufficiently demonstrate it. But it surely should move the minds of those who in our times oppose these doctrines with all their might, to observe that these doctrines have been held from the primitive times by men allowed to be the wisest and most upright. They may well be incited to allow some doubts whether their own sentiments be right, and to grant that a zeal for these doctrines may deserve a better name than mere speculative religion, when the scripture itself declares its connexion with practice, and the history of christian antiquity exemplifies that connexion.

It is submitted to the consideration of the reader, whether these reflections do not sufficiently answer the objection with respect to candour. Two things have been shewn to have uniformly obtained during the three first centuries, first, that there were all along a number of persons bearing the christian name, whose lives proved them to be the excellent of the earth. And secondly, that as far as appears, the character of genuine virtue belonged exclusively to men who espoused the peculiar doctrines of the gospel. From the apostles down to Ignatius, Polycarp, and Irenæus, to the age of Origen, both these assertions are demonstrable by the clearest evidence.

Origen alone, of all persons of superior reputation in the church, has been suspected as deficient in point of

orthodoxy. Were the suspicion swelled into a certain proof, the discredit which his philosophic mixtures have brought on his character, and the censures which so many wise and good men have so freely passed on him, as unsound in the faith, would rather prove our assertion of the uniformity of christian belief in these articles than the contrary. But that Origen, on the whole, believed these doctrines, is sufficiently proved by express passages of his works; and his well-known curious and adventurous spirit of inquiry, in subjects in which he never meant to be positive, will account for his ambiguities.

I cannot allow Dionysius of Alexandria to be an exception to my position, merely because he was once suspected to be heretical. His well-known explanation of himself sufficiently confutes the surmise. The Cyprianic age is full of the most luminous proofs. Even the treatise of Novatian (the first dissenter) on the Trinity is itself a strong argument. An elaborate and minute treatise on such a subject written by an innovator, against whom I have freely owned the best men of those times were much too censorious, would doubtless have been branded with peculiar infamy in the church, had it contained any sentiments contrary to the apostolical faith. Its deviation from truth would have been marked with peculiar asperity. But it is universally allowed, that the Novatians held the same doctrines as the general church, and differed only in point of discipline. What greater proof can be desired than such an uniformity?

Perhaps the case of Paul of Samosata may illustrate the subject still more forcibly. A bishop was, by the concurrent voice of the whole christian church, degraded and expelled, because he opposed these doctrines. The excellent lives of men of orthodox views are evident in these times of true goodness. I cannot see any proofs of such excellence in other persons who called themselves christians. I know the scantiness of historical materials. I can make some allowance for the prejudices of writers, and none but the orthodox of those

times have come down to us. But it seems impossible to reject the repeated testimony of such a man as Irenæus to the wickedness of heretics. Paul of Samosata is well known, and men of real holiness and virtue can scarce be entirely hid in any age in which they exist.

We have been told indeed great things of Ebionites, and they have been set up as the true standard of primitive orthodoxy. But it seems scarce possible for any man of learning, who has a disposition to examine things fairly and candidly, to lay any weight on such an opinion. Who is this Ebion? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God? What if it can be proved that he and his party believed exactly as some persons do who call themselves rational christians at this day, and thought as they did of Christ himself, of St. Paul, of all christian doctrines? Is an obscure person to be made a standard of doctrine, of whom we know only a few lines, and whose very existence is but faintly proved, and whose sect, though it certainly had an early existence, was condemned by all christian churches, and even by Origen himself, as heretical?*

It is certain that the Ebionites, in not receiving St. Paul's Epistles, as Origen tells us, acted consistently. But what are we to think of men who rejected thirteen Epistles of the New Testament, of whose divine authority there never was any doubt among christians?

And though the Epistle to the Hebrews has proofs of divine inspiration abundantly sufficient, yet were one to admit for a moment, that it was only the work of some pious person of very high antiquity in the church, and held in very great estimation, who that weighs things in the balance of truth would not admit its authority vastly to exceed that of the Ebionites? In a regular argumentative treatise, backed by the concurrent voice of the Old and New Testament, we see certain doctrines enlarged on abundantly, which by an obscure sect, of whom we know

* See Origen ad Celsum, b. 5, towards the end.

next to nothing, are barely denied. Is affirmation to stand good in preference to reasoning?

It is allowed that in weighing historical evidence the concurrent voice of the best writers ought to stand good against the single testimony of particular persons. It is on this ground that the testimony of Ctesias, on Persian affairs, is looked on as romantic. The account of the death of Cyrus, as slain by Tomyris, the Scythian queen, has no credit, because of the superior credibility of Xenophon. And he would be thought a weak critic in history, who should in our days assert, that

“ Charlemagne, with all his peerage, fell by Fontarabia.”

Milton, as a poet, may be allowed to say this on the evidence of romances. But sober history, which asserts in general the contrary, must be believed. On such weak ground seems to me to stand the authority of the Ebionites in matters of christian doctrine.

But perhaps the reader may see the force of these things in a stronger, at least a more useful light, if we attend a little to the nature of things.

Sentiments, when really and thoroughly imbibed, cannot be destitute of practical influence. If there be a favourite point in scripture, it is the recommendation of humility. The humble, with all their imperfections, must be admitted into heaven; the proud, with all the virtue, compatible with pride, must be excluded. Those doctrines therefore which support humility must be divine, those which nourish pride must be earthly, or even diabolical. Now the evangelical doctrines, just mentioned, are all of the former sort. The more they are relished and admired, the more do they direct the mind to honour God, to feel even infinite obligation to him, to entertain the lowest ideas of ourselves, to confound the pride of intellect, of riches, of virtue, of every thing human. To sing salvation to God and the Lamb, to confess our desert of destruction, and to ascribe our deliverance from it to the atoning blood, this is the employment of heaven. The taste and temper adapted to it must be formed here on earth by grace, and the whole

work of the Spirit, which we have seen exemplified in three centuries, is to produce and support these dispositions. And in the words and actions of holy men we have seen this effect. They believed heartily the truth of doctrines the most humiliating. They were poor in spirit, patient under the severest treatment and the most cruel injuries, because they were conscious of deserving much worse, contented in the meanest circumstances, because they felt the beauty of *his* condescension, who though he was rich became poor for their sakes, and who has provided for them sure and eternal riches. They were serene and confident in God, because they viewed him as their Father through the grace of Christ; full of charity, because they knew the love of God in Christ; in honour preferring others to themselves, because they were ever conscious of their own depravity; in fine, they gladly endured reproach for Christ's sake, because they knew his kingdom was not of this world.

Now take from these men the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, and all the motives and springs of christian action within them are annihilated. Morals may remain, and whatever is reputable in social life, but that which is properly of a pious and humble nature, is no more.

For whoever feels himself daily to be helpless, corrupt, and unworthy, whose hope of divine favour cannot exist for a moment, but under the belief of the most stupendous grace, who is compelled to pray by the voice of constant internal necessity, and who experiences the answer of prayer by repeated supernatural aids, must be induced to the constant exercise of humble thoughts with respect to himself, and of grateful thoughts with respect to his Maker. It is easy to see what a foundation is laid for meekness, gentleness, modesty, submission to the will of God, and of genuine compassion for the most wicked and most injurious, he himself being a child of wrath, by nature, as well as they. Nor is there a virtue, for which the primitive christians were so renowned, but it may be traced up to these principles.

It has been said indeed, that the sense of gratitude to God may be as strong in the minds of those who think better of human nature, in its present state, because they must own they are indebted to God for their natural powers and faculties. But the very feelings of our nature contradict the position. Something like humility may be produced, where men are every moment sensible of their dependant condition by experience ; not so, where men admit it in general theory, but are not led by experience to an habitual sense of it. One might ask whether a parent would expect to find a more grateful conduct in his children, if made completely independent, or well supplied indeed, but kept continually sensible of dependance on himself. The influence of anti-evangelical doctrines on the practice is but too evident.

Those who espouse them, if preserved in rectitude of moral conduct, are among ourselves at this day the proudest of men. Even when they attempt to be humble, the power of pride breaks forth and bears down all before it. They feel sufficient for any thing ; no subject of religion is too hard for their understandings. In all disputable questions they are sure to decide in that way which most gratifies vain glory and self conceit. The ministers of this stamp, however low and limited in capacity and education, are continually exercising the most unbounded, and often the most ridiculous arrogance. They are apt to wonder that the common people have no ears for them ; they do not consider that they themselves have no voice for the people. The views of God, of Christ, and human nature, which they exhibit, suit not the vulgar taste. They contradict experience ; and it is not to be wondered at, that those of their hearers who have any reasonable modesty, and the least tincture of humility, cannot relish their discourses, because the only food which is adapted to the taste of a miserable sinner is not ministered to them. Deserted by the populace, they betake themselves to the great. The favour of a few of the higher rank compensates to them the want of regard from the multitude ; and if

they cannot boast of numerous congregations, they console themselves at least with the thought, that theirs are genteel.

Politics, the affairs of nations, the reformation of states; these are to them the grand scenes which agitate their passions. To instruct ministers of states is their ambition; to bring souls to Christ is left to those whom they deem enthusiasts. Nor does any pathos appear in any of their writings and orations, except in the support of civil liberty, a valuable subject indeed, but with them ever carried to excess, and even when treated in its best manner belonging rather to statesmen than divines. Whoever has observed these men, may see them evidently haughty, overbearing, impatient of contradiction; men of all others the least fitted to suffer persecution for the cross of Christ, though exceedingly prone to enlarge on the iniquity of it, and arrogantly boasting of the sincerity of their religion, in an age when they are not likely to undergo any fiery trial that might be the test of it.

Are these the christians of the three first centuries? Were they such men as these whom Celsus scorned? No surely. If they were, their worldly, ambitious spirit might easily have found some of the many pretenders to the Roman empire, with whom they might have united. We should have seen christians active in politics, bargaining with different competitors for the empire, and insisting on some communication of temporal powers and privileges to themselves. Men so void of heavenly ambition would have displayed that which is of the earth; and had Ebion's religious sentiments been then as prevalent as now, the humble, meek, charitable, passive christians would not have adorned the historic page; but the turbulent, aspiring, political sons of Arius and Socinus would have been the predominant characters of the foregoing narrative.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



